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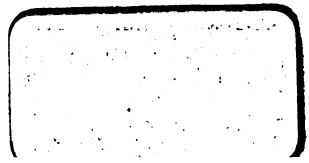

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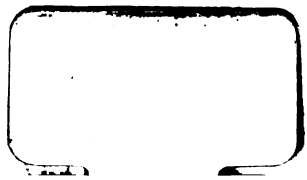

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MISS GWYNNE OF WOODFORD.

CHAPTER I.

IS THIS ALL?

"To-morrow truly will I meet with thee."

PHILIP, having arrived by the latest train at the neighbouring station, strode into the Forrester Bugle Horn, in the village of Forrest-range.

"Can I have supper and a bed here to night?" he asked of the landlord, who, seated in the bar, was smoking in company with the very select few who were usually to be found in that privileged part of the Bugle Horn after the sun had set.

The landlord, our acquaintance Mr. Jobbes, took the long clay pipe out of his mouth and stared at the new comer, who stood dripping wet in the doorway. The company following Mr. Jobbes' example in every particular.

"Can I get supper in the first place, a bed in the second?" asked Philip again.

Now a visitor was of the rarest occurrence at night, and Mr. Jobbes looked amazed. Laying down his pipe on the table, he rose, hemmed, and going to a corner of the room said,—

"Mrs. Jobbes!" (meekly.)

"Whatever do you want now?" demanded a voice from behind a curtain.

"Is there a bed, my dear?"

"Bed? no; no such a thing. Go back, Jobbes, and don't come botherin' here: 'ow ever am I to make the 'counts up, I should like to know?"

"A gentleman, my dear," humbly suggested Mr. Jobbes.

To assure herself of this fact, Mrs. Jobbes stood on tiptoe, and looked over the curtain; then sweeping a quantity of loose money into a drawer, she came forth all bustle and importance.

"We've a well-haired bed, and hall com-

fortable haccommodation," she said, with dignity.

"Very well. Get me supper," said Philip.

"Cert'nly, sir. Fried 'am and heggs?"

"Oh, anything; I'm not particular," said the stranger, seating himself on the bar table, and forthwith beginning to smoke.

In less than five minutes he was in high conversation with the company, and when supper was ready, and Mrs. Jobbes led the way to the clean parlour where the old-fashioned clock still ticked, they all to a man set Philip down as "a raal gen'lman and trav'ller from furrin parts."

The ham and eggs were remarkably good, and Philip's appetite was remarkably good too; for notwithstanding his troubles, he was in good health, and, being in good health, was hungry. While Mrs. Jobbes was removing the supper-tray, he asked,—

"How far is Forrestrange from the village?"

"The 'All, sir?" Mrs. Jobbes set the tray down again. "Well, sir, I should say it were only 'alf a mile hoff the near way."

"Half a mile," repeated Philip to himself.

"The distance do not exceed 'alf a mile, I

should say, sir. Do you think of going there to-night, sir?"

"No; not to-night."

"In the morning, sir? The hentrance is hopposite the Bugle 'Orn; the great gate is hover the way. Beautiful place, sir!"

"The family is at home?"

"Yes, sir; they've been at 'ome now this many month. The baby is so delicate, sir, that they don't like to leave: indeed, sir, many a day nobody thinks the poor little thing will get through it; she was very bad yesterday when I was up there."

Mrs. Jobbes said this to show her intimate knowledge of "the fam'ly."

"Indeed," said Philip, interested.

"Yes, sir; poor baby's 'ealth makes 'em all hanxshus; and then Mrs. Forrester's own 'ealth being so delicate, makes 'em more hanxshus still. You see, sir, I live at the 'all till I marry, in the late Mr. Forrester's time; so nat'rally I take a hinterest in the fam'ly, and feel hanxshus too."

"Ah! I dare say."

"Yes, sir; and then young master—maybe you know Squire Forrester?—Oh, well, sir, young master is kind and pleasant always to

heverybody. He comes down 'ere this morning and asks me if I remembered how hold he were. 'Jane,' says he (my name's Jane, sir, and I were there when he were a boy), 'do you know I am getting grey.' 'Lauk, no, sir, no such a thing,' says I. 'But I am, Jane; Miss Bryan says so: look at my hair,' says he, taking off his cap. In course, I say again, 'No such a thing, sir;" but, to tell truth, I was 'stonished to see him. It's in the last two or three months he 'ave changed so."

"Is Miss Bryan well?" asked Philip, coolly.

"I should say so, sir. Oh, dear, ain't she the life of the 'ouse? Do you know her, sir? Ain't she a sweet young lady?"

"Yes," thought Philip, "every one likes Kate." Aloud—"Then there's no company at Forrest-range at present?"

"Comp'ny, sir? no, sir; there's been no comp'ny this many a month: our young master is too good-'arted to 'ave visiting when baby is so ill. The 'ouse 'as been very remarkable quiet of late."

Philip could have worshipped Mrs. Jobbes on the spot. A huge load was taken off him. Kate, after all, was not plunged in a vortex of gay society where all the men adored her; no, here

she is, leading a quiet domestic life, in a sick house! Dear, dear Kate! He knew, for he had frequently joked her on the subject, there was nothing she hated so much as letter-writing: besides, "out of sight out of mind" with her; but living in this quiet way, even if she had neglected him, in all probability she had seen no one else to like better. The relief was so great to find she was not whirled away in fashionable life, that everything became *couleur de rose;* he turned into the bar again, and in the fulness of his heart "stood glasses all round," as it is popularly expressed.

When he looked out of the window next morning the sky was cloudless, the rain having cleared during the night and given place to a glorious summer day; he opened the old-fashioned casement, and the sweet smell of the clustering roses, creeping up with the ivy against the wall, came into the room.

"This Forrestrange must be an ancient place," he thought, as he saw where the road swept back to the great gateway. The gate was hung to massive granite pillars, surmounted by the Forrester crest, a bugle horn carved in stone; the entrance and great walls were strong and solid enough to bear a siege, and there were loop-

holes in the lodge walls, though partially grown over with creepers now. "Ay," he thought, "it's as fine a place as Bryan Mount—poor old Bryan Mount."

He dressed himself leisurely, being in no hurry; for he had no wish to present himself at the hall too early: he would call like any other visitor, and see how Kate would receive him. If she was cool at first—well, never mind; she always came round after a while: it would all come right—such a jolly day! just the day to bring good luck.

It is certainly true that often before blighting sorrow there comes an extraordinary flow of good spirits; you feel intensely happy, as if, indeed, you were quaffing deep draughts of gladness, whence you know not: existence alone is pleasure. Can it be that the last drop in the cup of happiness is the sweetest?

Philip is so jocund this bright morning that Mrs. Jobbes wonders as she brings in the breakfast how ever she could have thought the gentleman fierce-looking last night. While he is at breakfast she takes a look round from the "Bugle-Horn" door; presently the great gate opposite is drawn back, and a carriage comes down the road.

In she rushes to Philip, exclaiming,—

"The carriage from the 'all, sir. If you'll take the trouble to look out of the window, you'll see the 'ole party, sir. There's a horatorio at Frorn to-day, sir: all the country 'ouses will be there, sir. Baby must be better. 'Eer they come, sir."

Philip looked out; the window being small and the parlour dark, he, unseen, could see all. An open barouche: a first-rate equipage; the horses splendid; the plain, silver-mounted harness flashing in the morning sunshine; a gentleman driving, with a lady seated on the box at his side. The gentleman walked his horses to the inn door, stopped, and shouted,—

"Mrs. Jobbes!"

"'Eer, sir," cried the landlady, rushing out.

Philip involuntarily started back, for the carriage was close to the window, and the lady on the box was Kate.

There were two ladies in the carriage, one exceedingly pretty, fair, and blue-eyed. He could see her quite well as she reclined languidly, and guessed correctly that this was Mrs. Forrester. Blanche sat beside her, looking cold and proud as usual.

"Mrs. Jobbes," said the gentleman, "will you

be good enough to send up to the house to say we shall be at home to dinner? We thought of not returning until after the evening performance at Frorn, but we have changed our minds since we started; haven't we, Kate?" He looked down at Kate, who looked up at him, and both laughed.

"Well, you needn't laugh, I'm sure; I never considered how late it would be till we came through the gate," said the lady inside, plaintively.

"No, my love; of course not: you never do till we are half way there," replied the gentleman. The lady at his side glanced merrily up again, and he smiled down on her.

"Well, I'm sure it would be late," remarked Mrs. Forrester again, feebly.

"Quite right; yes. You'll send up, Mrs. Jobbes?"

"Cert'nly, sir" (curtseying to the ground). "The sweet baby is better, ma'am?"

"Thank you, she is," replied Mrs. Forrester, feebly.

"I am 'appy to 'ear it, ma'am," said Mrs. Jobbes, again curtseying.

The carriage drove off, and she re-entered the house.

"I didn't know, sir, whether I ought to 'ave said there was a gentleman 'eer as was going up to the 'all," she said, clearing away Philip's breakfast.

"No; you were quite right not: I can go there when they return." He rose, and going out of the room, said, "Miss Bryan is the only one of the party I know; she is my cousin."

"Sir, you'll be pleased to horder dinner?" cried Mrs. Jobbes, running after him.

"Dinner? yes. Anything you can give me."

"What time, sir?"

"Time? Any time you like." With which explicit understanding he was leaving the house, when Mrs. Jobbes again called after him, "Two o'clock, sir?"

"As well as any time," said Philip, striding along the road where the carriage had disappeared round the corner: not that he had any intention of following, but he went that way; perhaps they might stop again, and then he would pass, and see how Kate would take it. This was his idea; but when he got to the turn, the carriage was already out of sight, so, climbing over the palings, he got into the wood and sat down on the bank.

Now he began to regret not having walked boldly out to speak to Kate; but soon he came to the conclusion it was better not: such a sudden meeting would have been awkward for both. The best plan would be for him to call at Forrestrange this evening, and ask to see her alone. Oh, yes, it would be all right this evening.

In the afternoon he strolled out again; this time in the other direction. Passing down the village, he presently followed a footpath to the wooden bridge. He crossed it, and walked along the Woodford drained lands—now the best pasture and lea-lands in the neighbourhood.

He went along the path on the embankment by the river for some distance, and presently saw the mansion of Forrestrange, with its parapets and stacked chimneys, on the eminence above the wood.

"No wonder Kate likes being here," he thought; and a twinge came over him as, involuntarily, he contrasted the stately-looking place with plain Connomore.

Then the long shadows lying on the meadows told of evening, and, what was of far more importance, the Forrestrange dinner-hour. So returning to the village, he reached it in time to

see Mr. Forrester's carriage dashing up to the entrance.

When the great full moon rose above the poplars in the meadow, Philip, too, went that way.

CHAPTER II.

MEETING BY MOONLIGHT.

"Why ever wast thou lovely in my eyes?"

THROUGH dense masses of wood the road winds up the hill, emerging on a level sweep, where, terraced, stands Forrestrange; a fine and imposing-looking place in the moonlight. Lights gleam from a row of windows on the ground floor and from the low entrance archway, the door of which is open. Philip Bryan's admiration of the noble old mansion is not untinged with misgivings of the influence of the place and its owner on his impulsive and fickle-minded cousin Kate.

Just as he raises the ponderous knocker, a grey-haired servant crosses the shining oak floor of the hall, and, seeing him in the doorway, advances with evident surprise.

Philip straightway asks for Miss Bryan.

"She is not in just now," answered the man, shortly.

"Perhaps you can tell me where I am likely to find her?"

"Well, sir—indeed—I can't tell, sir."

"Is Mr. Forrester at home then?"

"Yes, sir, he is at home; but not in the house just now, indeed."

"Deuce take the fellow!" thinks Philip; "he won't admit me, I suppose."

"Be so good as to give my card, and ask Miss Bryan, on her return, at what time I may see her to-morrow; I will call to know, presently: I am her cousin, Doctor Bryan."

"Indeed, sir!" said the man, our old friend Jack, with sudden alacrity. "Maybe, indeed, sir, if you tuk a stroll down t'ward the river you might meet her. She 'ave only just tuk a walk seeing the evenin' be fine, after dinner, along with master."

"Down this way, is it?"

"Yes, sir; along of them terrace steps. You can't miss of it; but, indeed, sir, if you'll like, I'll come and show you the way. A'though the moon is up, it's dark enough in them trees."

"Oh, I can find my way," said Philip, walking off.

He descended the broad terrace steps, and soon struck into a narrow walk, black in shadow, under great trees; this he followed, until presently the murmur of the river fell on his ear.

"I must be nearly at the end now," he thought. "Perhaps I have missed them; I will go as far as that open space, however, before I return."

He stepped off the gravel walk on to the grass, as he came out of the wood. In the broad moonlight on the river bank there were two persons sitting on a rustic seat; but their backs being towards him he could not be certain who they were, but he felt it must be the pair he was in search of. He stood still; his heart beating so fast he could hardly draw his breath. All was plain to him now—everything. The fierceness of a wild beast was springing up within him; but he mastered himself, and strode right in front of the two.

"Kate!" he said.

They both started up. For a moment she seemed bewildered. Philip noted this. The white dress, the flowers in her dark hair, the shawl thrown round her, and she herself, more beautiful than ever, became impressed vividly, scorched as it were into his mind.

"Kate!" he said again. But it did not sound in the least like Philip Bryan's voice.

She made no reply, except by clinging to Stephen. Philip saw this too, and it goaded him to furious rage. In a loud harsh tone he asked,—

"I suppose you don't know me? Have you forgotten your cousin Philip?"

"Are you Kate's cousin?" broke in Stephen, whose arm Kate held tightly. "Then shake hands—I am another cousin. Any one belonging to Kate will be welcome at Forrestrange. Come, shake hands—ha, ha!"

He spoke rather thickly, and laughed in a short, forced way. Evidently he had been drinking.

"Come," he went on, "shake hands, my good fellow, and return with Kate and me."

"Damn you, never!" burst out Philip, and, suddenly hitting out, he struck Stephen a blow which sent him staggering backwards till he fell.

Without one moment's pause, Philip seized Kate as if she had been an infant, and tore away with her, with the speed and strength of a madman.

One loud shriek she gave, which sent the birds flapping blindly from their roosts in the branches overhead; and then Philip stifled her screams by placing his hand on her mouth.

He was quite mad with passion, and for some moments possessed the strength of half a dozen men; but his rage, her struggles, and the steep ascent, at last took his breath away, and he was forced to stop. He sat down, placing her across his knees, still keeping his hand on her mouth.

Presently his hot fury began to abate, and reason returned.

"What am I about?" he muttered, releasing his grip.

Instantly she started up, gasping,—

"You want to murder *me* too; you have killed *him:* I know you have."

"Kate, Kate!" he interrupted. "Fly from here: I will save you from further shame. Come away now: this instant!"

Again he seized hold of her.

"No, no," she cried, struggling.

"Yes, Kate; you must. Come!"

"I won't," she replied, vehemently.

"You shall not remain here. No, by Heaven!" he cried, in a shrill voice.

She began to cry, and clasped her hands in his face.

"Oh, come, Kate!" he pleaded.

She sobbed, and said something incoherent.

"Come, Kate, now: this very moment!"

"No, not now; not to-night," at last she said.

"But you *shall* go," he cried, suddenly grasping her, and lifting her up again. "I won't suffer you to remain one hour more in this accursed place."

"I *won't* go with you," she screamed. "I *don't* want to go with you: I hate and detest you."

Freeing herself, she sprang away, and was soon hidden in the black shadows. Then Philip set his teeth and clenched his fist. He cared not to go after her now; but, muttering in a cold, harsh tone, "Ay, run to seek him, Kate Bryan: he knows your worth better than I, I dare swear," he turned away.

Kate had hardly got out of sight before she met Stephen, who, not very much the worse for the blow (it had only stunned him for a moment), was coming up the hill in hot pursuit.

"Where is he? The fellow! he shall have the soundest thrashing he ever had in all his life," panted Stephen. "I will thrash him first, and horsewhip him afterwards. Which way did he go?"

"Never mind him," she cried; "he is a wild sort of creature. Let him go; he is quite mad."

"'Never mind him!' Tell me which way he went? 'Never mind him,' indeed!"

Now Kate by this had become cool. Her wits had returned to her aid, and she knew that her character was at stake.

"Let him escape, Stephen," she began.

"No!" he shouted. "He shall be horsewhipped, I swear. I swear he shan't escape: which way did he go?"

"I can't tell."

"But I *must* find him. If I don't catch him myself, I swear I'll turn out all the men. The fellow, to give me a blow! What does he mean?"

"He was angry that I clung to you when I was startled, that was it."

"Damn him! Why shouldn't you, I wish to know? Where did you see him last?"

"Oh, I wish you would let him escape!" pleaded Kate.

"No," shouted Stephen, walking off.

"Oh, Stephen!" cried Kate, keeping pace with him, "do be quiet. He wants me to go home; he thinks, if I do, I'll marry him."

"I don't care a hang what he thinks!" interrupted Stephen. "He shall know what *I* think, and that immediately."

She put her hand on his arm, and looked up in his face, and said softly,—

"But I won't go: I won't marry him: I'll stay here, if you'll be quiet."

"You may say what you like, but he *shall* be horsewhipped. The fellow! I'll go off to the village."

"No, no," she pleaded, fixing her eyes earnestly on his.

"I will; I shall catch him there."

"No; Mr. Stephen, we must be going home,"

she said, archly, "or sure it's a mess we shall be in."

It was the same voice and the same Kate that we knew years ago; impossible to withstand. He looked down on her lustrous eyes, which seemed to melt with entreaty. Who could resist that upturned face, so very beautiful, and so very near.

* * * * *

And so, presently, they walked homewards; Stephen consenting to let Kate bathe his face with vinegar, and prepared to declare most positively he had struck up against a branch in the dark: both convinced the less said about the night's adventure the better.

Meanwhile, Philip, after losing his way several times in the dense woods, returned to the inn, a hard, reckless man; and in less than an hour he had left Forrestrange far behind.

"I will never see her again: never!" he solemnly vowed, with a fierce oath.

CHAPTER III.

DARKNESS.

"Yea, this man's brow, like to a title-leaf,
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume."

MAUD, in the early sunlight, was gathering fresh flowers for the breakfast-table; her father enjoyed them when he came downstairs, and Hugh declared breakfast was nothing without a nosegay to scent the room. She was stooping over the mignonette bed, when a shadow caused her to look up. Philip Bryan, looking haggard and wretched, stood there. She started up in affright, clutching fast hold of her black-silk apron, where her flowers were stowed.

"Dr. Bryan!" she exclaimed, "what *has* happened? What *can* be the matter? Do tell me at once!"

"Am I so very dreadful-looking?" he asked, with a forced gaiety.

"Tell me what the matter is," she urged, advancing to him.

"Oh, I'll tell you soon enough," he replied.

She saw that he was quite worn out.

"First come in and have some breakfast," she said; an idea coming into her mind that he was really in need of food.

"Ay, that's a good move."

He followed her indoors. Neither Mr. Gwynne nor Hugh was down yet, but Maud insisted on his taking breakfast at once.

"It will do me good, I know," he said, "for I have not tasted a morsel for two days."

By and by he pushed back his chair, and abruptly said,—

"Miss Gwynne, it is worse than I thought possible."

"You mean—Miss Bryan?" hazarded Maud.

"Ay, worse than I ever thought possible. Oh," he went on, "I am half mad when I think of it."

"Tell me—" interrupted Maud, faintly.

"It is not that she is faithless to me; I could have borne that: other men have—and, in time, I could have forgiven her; but it is the dread that she is faithless to herself—to you, to every honest woman, which maddens me." He walked restlessly to and fro.

"Oh, my sweet, pretty Kate!" he began again, with a tenderness in his voice which brought the tears to Maud's eyes. "To cling to him, to love him, perhaps, and he not lawful for her to love: oh, Kate!"

Then of a sudden he turned sharply, looked at Maud, and said, savagely,—

"I denounce that man as a villain! a monstrous villain! I say so before God and man—he—that man: I cannot name him."

"Stephen Forrester?" suggested Maud, becoming as white as death.

"That man is scheming against Kate; he is laying snares to ruin her happiness for ever."

The blood rushed into Maud's face, as if she had been dealt a violent blow, and she cried sharply and decidedly,—

"That is untrue: he is not."

"He is; I know it. He took her out walking in the moonlight; I saw them: he had his arm round her. She would have been my wife now, but for that scoundrel."

"It may not be as you suppose; he is her cousin."

"Then, in God's name, why don't you get her away before it's too late? My poor Kate is too innocent and guileless."

Maud turned giddy and sick. She was cold and trembling too. With uncertain steps she went out of the parlour upstairs to her own room, and dropped on her knees at her bedside.

CHAPTER IV.

LAST WORDS.

"They say the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention."

"MAUD, you have had some hard sorrow to-day; let me share it, dear."

In Hugh's eyes there shone that light which gave him an almost divine look.

"Yes, Hugh, I will tell you all. Truly I need counsel, and I will abide by what you say."

It was one of those days of dead calm that so frequently come about midsummer—sultry and dazzling. It was too hot for going out, and Hugh and Maud were alone in the parlour; Philip Bryan having departed as suddenly as he came, and Mr. Gwynne resting in his room during the heat of the day.

"Well, open your heart unreservedly; it will relieve you."

"I will; but it is a long story—a very long

and very miserable story: I know I shall tire you."

"Tire me? oh, no!"

"It is misery to speak of it—of what has gone by. But as something tells me I ought to be acting now, I must lay this wretched past before you, to enable you to advise me."

She paused.

"Well, Maud?"

"Perhaps, Hugh, you never knew that, many years ago, I was fond of Stephen Forrester," she began rapidly, "and he was fond of me: at least he told me so; but one summer Miss Bryan came to Forrestrange, and then Stephen liked her better."

"Kate Bryan!" he exclaimed, and a burning flush came over his face.

"And no wonder," pursued Maud, "for she was beautiful and fascinating."

"She was," assented Hugh, gently.

"And that summer—soon after—indeed, in a very few days—godpapa died; and when he was ill—on his deathbed—I sitting at his bedside, he spoke of Stephen. It was very strange, but Kate Bryan seemed to be his dread; and he asked me, if ever Stephen got to care about her—or got wrong, I think he meant—would I use all my influence to bring him straight again.

But I did not promise; only I think he took it for granted, for he pressed my hand."

"Go on, Maud; why do you stop?"

"I was thinking how often I have dreamt lately of him: just as he was, lying there in the great Red Room at Forrestrange."

"Never mind dreams, come to reality."

"Where was I?" Her lip was trembling, and she paused a moment, then went on nervously:—"Well, after he died, Stephen and I became as we were before. But soon papa's loss came; and the day I knew it, Stephen happened to come to ask me to go abroad with Blanche and him. I was purse-proud, I suppose, for when he offered to treat me I felt indignant; we misunderstood each other, and that led to a quarrel: we separated; and I did not see him again until I went to Forrestrange from Hafod."

"Oh!" thought Hugh, his memory rushing over the previous years; "how little I knew what bitterness there was in Maud's heart! Her other sorrows must have been light compared to this unspeakable one."

"Stephen then was as kind as ever," continued Maud, "and the barriers that I had tried to place on my affections I found good for nothing. I couldn't help it, indeed! But at last it dawned upon me that Blanche did not approve of our

caring for each other; though, excepting where Stephen was concerned, she was kind as kind could be. But when she came to show her dislike to our being together, so plainly as to be insulting, I left, and never saw *him* again until he was married."

"My poor Maud!"

A vast pity overflowed Hugh's eyes, and a yearning sympathy beat within his heart.

"Well, Hugh, my affection for him, so strong once, died then. Yet I feel an irrepressible desire to avert evil from him; more, I think, on god-papa's account than his own. And this is what I want to know—whether it is right or not, for me to use any influence I may have? Some mysterious force impels me to try and avert it now. Is it right for me to do so, or is it wrong?"

"You must speak more plainly, Maud. What is this evil? Your influence may not be attended with beneficial results. Is it the evil of drinking you would try and save poor Stephen from?"

"Not the drinking alone; other things as well: evils arising from, or rather following in the train of drinking, perhaps."

"I don't quite see, Maud, how you could carry out the promptings of your kind heart, without being constantly near poor Stephen: then there

is his wife, and Blanche; surely *they* ought to do what they can."

"Blanche wrote to me some time ago, begging of me to go there, and I viewed the matter then precisely as you do now. Since that time—indeed, to-day—I have changed completely. Oh! Hugh, I heard this morning—Dr. Bryan came on his way from there and told me—that Stephen forgets everything so far as now to be carrying on a flirtation, or love affair, with Kate Bryan, who has been staying there since last winter. That is why I have had those wretched dreams of late. What am I to do? Tell me, Hugh!"

The sight of her emotion, the quivering mouth, the earnest expression in her pure eyes, affected Hugh deeply.

"Maud," he said, nervously, "we have God's word that it is good for our own souls to turn sinners from the error of their ways. If, in this sad case, you think or feel that you can save them from folly which you dread may end in misery, go to Forrestrange at once. Induce *her* to leave: invite her here, and bring her with you; or take her anywhere away. But it may be a hard task for thee, my poor Maud!" he added, with inexpressible gentleness.

"Hugh, yes!" she replied, firmly, though trembling all over; "it *will* be a hard task.

Once I almost vowed in my secret heart *never* to meet him again, if I could help it; I felt so pained, humbled, in his society. That feeling is gone now: I am quite changed. The friendship—nay, more, the affection—I had, and ought to have, for them at Forrestrange, absorbed, swallowed up, as it were, in my then misery, has returned. My love for him has passed through that pain into another feeling—changed its nature: yes, Hugh, quite changed its nature—passed through a fiery ordeal, in which I almost experienced strong hatred, into a sorrowful kind of affection (if you can understand what I mean) for him—an affection such as a sister has for an erring brother—and an irrepressible desire to save him from impending misery. Although it may be a hard task, as you say, I will perform it to the best of my power."

She spoke firmly and rapidly; her breath, when she stopped, coming short and quick.

"Lose not a day, Maud," said Hugh, presently. "Your best way is to get *her* from there: but you must be very, very careful. Truly it is a delicate work; you must be tender, yet strong."

"I know that. To induce her to leave will be my aim. Perhaps, after all, Dr. Bryan exaggerated the evil: I believe he was half mad when he was here this morning."

"Poor man! I think you told me he was engaged to be married to her? Maud, I pity him; indeed I do! Set out on your mission without loss of time, and God be with you."

CHAPTER V.

A HARD TASK.

"Let not him that putteth his hand to the plough look back,
Though the ploughshare cut through the flowers of life to its fountains."

* * * * *

A SLOW coach journey in foggy rain, with an undefined feeling of unhappiness weighing on the spirits, is a very wretched thing. So Maud thought some days later, when, after having written to Blanche, saying she found she could leave home for a short time, and should be glad to visit Forrestrange, and receiving a reply expressive of thankfulness, she set off from Carrag.

The weather had changed: in the evening towards sunset a breeze had sprung up from the south-west, and the sun went down behind a mass of watery clouds rising on the horizon. A

drizzling rain set in next morning: the mountains were hidden in mist, and the sea obscured by fog; the rain dripped from the eaves, and the wind, though not blowing hard, moaned through the windows facing the sea all night long at Hafod. Most depressing was the weather, and most depressed did Maud feel when she left home.

Long before the coach arrived at the railway station, she repented of her resolution: once, indeed, she thought of returning, she felt so miserable; however, when the coach stopped, she got her railway ticket and went on. She was quite ill for the rest of the journey, yearning to be back at Hafod with Hugh; feeling indifferent, too, about other things, wondering at the step she had taken, and coming to the conclusion she could do no good. But when the train arrived at Frorn station, and she saw in the twilight, thick with rain, Stephen and Kate standing on the platform, a sharp pang shot through her, and her indifference vanished.

He had driven down to Frorn, he said, to avoid the necessity of her going farther on. Oh! it was no trouble: he liked the drive; for it was so confoundedly wet, there was no doing anything else. The others weren't inclined to move this weather, but Kate had pluck for anything, and came too. He

was uncommonly glad to see Maud, but she would find it deuced *slow* at Forrestrange; it was so infernally dull. Dinner would be ready by the time they got there: Wilks must look sharp. No, he did not drive himself; he had brought the close carriage, and would go inside again: there was plenty of room.

All the way home he rattled and talked incessantly, in a reckless coarse manner; which, however, seemed to amuse Kate much, for she laughed at everything he said; while Maud, her cheeks burning, thought, "And is this Stephen?"

It was dark long before they got to Forrestrange, and when they entered the lit hall, there for the first time she saw his discoloured cheek and generally bloated appearance. It shocked her dreadfully, and when he seized her hand again and shook it warmly, saying, "Welcome once more, Maud, to Forrestrange," she half drew back.

"You are frightened at my black eye, I suppose," he said, in a loud, stentorian voice. "Beastly unlucky I was to get it: I ran up against a stump in the dark, confound it!"

"Sure it's very much better, and will be well in a few days," said Kate.

Out of the drawing-room, on hearing their

voices, Blanche came. With much show of affection she greeted Maud, kissing her and caressing her warmly.

"I swear you make one's mouth water," said Stephen. "Please to remember I am an old friend too, Maud."

Whereupon Maud went off into the drawing-room, and Blanche followed. Mrs. Forrester, who was reclining in full evening costume, rose on Maud's entrance, and expressed a kind of feeble pleasure. Blanche here desired Maud to make no change in her dress, and then escorted her to her room, telling her to hurry down as soon as possible, and not to mind Stephen's manner, for unhappily he had taken too much wine to-day. Thanking Maud for coming in an earnest way, Blanche burst into tears and left. Maud hurried to bathe her face, which burnt like fire, and after smoothing her hair, returned to the drawing-room, where she found them assembled.

At dinner, being opposite Kate, Maud thought her prettier than ever; and yet, as dinner went on, she noticed there was something peculiar about her: there was a hard look at times in the bright hazel eyes, and quick anxious glances came and went restlessly from underneath the long, dark, silken lashes. Although there was a certain indescribable expression in her face which touched

Maud sadly, her velvety cheek dimpled just the same as ever with bright smiles.

But Stephen! Him she could only regard with repugnance. How could *he* have changed thus? Yet, with this aversion, there came a conviction to her mind that he was miserable; the loud talking, excited manner, and flushed face did not deceive her: she thought he was miserable; and she thought rightly.

No man more miserable in all England than Stephen Forrester! Bitterly each morning he rued his actions; bitterly he thought of the last few years of his life. Then, to drown thought, he would drink, drink, drink! until he got into a state of noisy excitement. When there was no hunting or shooting, he was worse; he would lie in bed in the morning, until, unable to bear his feelings, he would get up and—drink!

But there is a stinging self-reproach now, which absorbs all else. If consequences might be done away with, what atonement would he not make! If wrong-doing might be absorbed by amends, he would make amends with the whole of his estate! Yet with these feelings he went on from day to day just the same: self-accusing, and bitterly penitent, one moment; intemperate, and reckless, the next. He was not lost to all sense of right: no; Philip Bryan was wrong there. "Stephen

is weak, not wicked," thought Maud that night. And though she would have shrunk from his touch, yet in her strong woman's heart she yearned to help him—to restore him to what he was once; as if she were a sister, and he a brother laid low with some horrible disease.

"But how to act? what to do?" she asked herself. "Bring Kate away," Hugh said. "How?" she thought. "One must be so careful to avoid anything like suspicion. I marvel at Blanche: she is not blind; and yet that Kate and Stephen flirt is palpable even to me, who have not been in the house many hours. One must be so very careful not to open Mrs. Forrester's eyes, since she evidently does not see this. Of course her happiness would be gone were she to discover it; but how she remains in ignorance, I cannot imagine. I don't believe, though, there is anything beyond a foolish flirtation: I think there is nothing but frivolity. Kate's manner is free; but she may mean nothing by it: besides, she knows him so well. Oh, perhaps, after all, they have not gone the lengths that Philip Bryan imagined."

The following morning, when Maud went down there was no one in the breakfast room, so she went up into the nursery to see the baby. What a

little wee thing it was! not yet able to stand alone, though nearly two years old. It uttered feeble cries as the process of washing, consisting of dabbing with a damp towel, went on. Maud hoped nurse was well, and that baby was getting on nicely?

"Pretty well, miss—a delicate bud is baby; not of the coarse sort, bless her." (Another dab.)

"Isn't she very thin, nurse?"

"Not robust certainly, miss."

Nurse hastily wiped the few traces of damp from the poor little body and began to dress it.

"She looks so weak, nurse."

"She's wonderfully improved of late, miss; a little while gone by I thought she would never come to anything: indeed, I expected every day would be her last."

"Poor baby!"

"Well, well, then," said the nurse, as the child, lying on its back on her lap crying querulously, was getting blue in the face. "It shall have something to do it good."

The woman reached from the chimney-piece a bottle labelled "Daffy's Elixir," and poured a teaspoonful down the little thing's throat. Soon the child ceased crying.

"Blessed rimidy—quiets her directly—has con- pints of it," observed nurse, completing

the baby's toilet; the child's eyes now looking heavy and stupid.

"So I should think," said Maud, drily.

She went out of the nursery disgusted. If ever a child was starved, drugged, and neglected, this one was.

"Why don't they give it good, healthy food, Blanche," she asked when she met her the next moment in the passage, "instead of drugging it in this way?"

"I know very little about children, Maud, and Florence has every trust in nurse; I would not interfere for the world," returned Blanche.

"Indeed she'll be starved," said Maud.

"Oh, no, I dare say not; she'll do very well. Come down this passage, Maud, and see the improvements made here of late;" and Blanche led the way to the end, where a door, built up years ago, had been reopened. It was the extremity of the east gable, and a flight of steps led to the shrubbery.

"What a lovely view!" exclaimed Maud, as Blanche drew the door back. "When had you this done, Blanche?"

"Some months ago now. It makes a pleasant surprise at the end of this dark passage, does it not?"

"Charming; why was it blocked up formerly?

I remember, when a child, I used to regard it with awe, the arch of the old doorway being plainly visible, and fancied it led to all sorts of mysteries."

"My father thought it made this part of the house cold; and I think it must too, especially when the wind is from the east. But Kate—who sleeps in this next room, has slept here all the spring, when east winds were remarkably prevalent, if you recollect—says she doesn't think it makes any difference. I was averse to the place being opened at first, because my father blocked it up; and he had a good reason for everything he did: but Stephen would have it. Now I am reconciled, for without doubt it is an immense improvement."

"Without doubt!" answered Maud. But she was not enthusiastic. She, too, had a feeling against undoing what the squire had done.

With this, Kate came out of the adjoining room, looking as fresh as a rosebud after a June shower.

"Is it admiring the view you are?" she exclaimed on seeing them. "Ah, Miss Gwynne, you don't know how pleasant it is here, in the early morning: the little thrushes, and the cuckoos, and all the birds sing enough to bother me."

"Yes," said Blanche, "this part of the house is still. You see, Maud, it looks away from

the offices and inhabited portions to the shrubbery and woods."

"Let us go down this way," said Maud.

"Then, Kate, tell Florence we shall be in the breakfast-room directly," said Blanche. "I heard her go down; she will be wondering where we are."

Away tripped Kate, and Blanche and Maud descended the steps to the shrubbery. It was very strange: Maud expected, even dreaded, that Blanche, now they were alone, would speak of Stephen; but no, not one word! She certainly avoided the subject altogether and spoke of irrelevant matters, while they found their way through the luxuriant shrubs to the terrace.

"Where the deuce have you both been?" asked Stephen as they entered the breakfast-room. "We've nearly done breakfast." He rose and drew Maud's chair near his own, exclaiming,—"I say, Maud, you're quite refreshing to look at. What a stunning colour you have!"

Kate, who was at breakfast, here laid down her knife and fork.

"You've not done?" asked Stephen.

"Yes, thank you;" and she moved from the table and went to the window.

Stephen just glanced at her, but went on with his breakfast, and talked fast.

Mrs. Forrester finished hers, and then leant back in her chair, and asked,—

"Can you drive me over to Woodford this morning, Stephen dear?"

"Stephen dear" hesitated just for a moment.

"Oh, if you don't like it, say so; I can go by myself."

"We'll all drive over there this afternoon," said Stephen, in a compromising way: "it will do as well as the morning, perhaps."

"Oh, it doesn't signify; I know whatever I propose is wrong."

"Confounded nonsense!" remarked Stephen, politely.

Mrs. Forrester began to pant, shutting her eyes, and invoking faintness.

"Take me to my room! take me to my room!" she panted hysterically.

"Not I: I am sick of these airs," said Stephen, dashing out of the room.

She began to sob, then to shiver, then her teeth chattered, then she laughed, then she cried, then she trembled again, and finally "came to," when she found there was only Maud in the room. Kate had gone out soon after Stephen, and Blanche had likewise vanished. This was of such frequent occurrence that no one regarded it; indeed, when they all met at luncheon, there

was not the slightest allusion made to the morning scene.

Floy had recovered, but she was sulky: "hurt, vexed," Blanche would have termed it years ago; "abominably sulky," she said to-day in confidence to Maud.

"That's the way always, Maud," she said after luncheon, during which Floy had preserved rigid silence, and declined all Stephen's little attentions; for he always tried to make up the first. "There is no getting her out of these tempers. You don't know *how* trying she is to live with."

"Oh, she will be all right by the time she comes from Woodford," returned Maud.

Mrs. Forrester, Kate, and Stephen had just set off; Blanche and Maud were walking on the terrace.

"You are very much mistaken," said Blanche: "a fit of this kind lasts several days."

"How pleasant it is after the rain!" observed Maud.

"Yes," said Blanche, abstractedly.

"How green the meadows look!" she observed again.

"Yes."

"Papa is beginning to get a good return now for the expenditure in the draining."

"Yes."

"To us, the rent of the meadows will be quite an income."

"Yes."

"Blanche, you are not attending one bit," laughed Maud.

"Yes, I am; the rent of the meadows you were talking of. Maud, I suppose your father has no intention of selling Woodford?"

"Selling? oh, no."

Blanche was silent.

Now, when Mr. Gwynne left Woodford, everybody said the place would be sold sooner or later. Everybody also said that Mr. de Lisle would be the purchaser; indeed, Mr. de Lisle said so himself: that was, if Mr. Gwynne sold it.

Now Florence being Mr. de Lisle's only child would be sole heir to the property, and if she married Stephen Forrester, Woodford would be merged in the Forrestrange estate. There would not be a more compact estate in England, everybody said. Why, in that case, from the terrace at Forrestrange, north, south, east, west, the Forresters would only see their own: to the farthest horizon, and beyond, the broad lands would be all one property: not one acre would belong to any one else. It would be one of the finest properties in England; for the woods were magnificent, the lands extensive, the farms

splendid, the buildings good, and added to all this, a great river ran through the whole estate: without doubt it would be the finest property in England within a ring fence.

So Blanche Forrester thought, and she had planned and arranged things so that the marriage was speedily brought about; for Florence de Lisle was young and lovely, and Stephen Forrester was easily impressed and impulsive.

But everything did not turn out exactly as she anticipated, for, as we have seen, Mr. Gwynne preferred retiring to seclusion and living on a narrow income, to selling.

"Maud," said Blanche, suddenly, "if I could have foreseen things, Stephen should never have married as he did!"

"Good gracious, Blanche, how could you have prevented it?" cried Maud.

"I could!" she exclaimed, energetically, "I know I could, at that time. Oh, Maud, I pity him from the bottom of my heart! Did you ever see such a goose as Florence?"

"We can't calculate on results: things don't turn out as we expect, always. She was so pretty, Blanche."

"Pretty? yes—and that's all: literally all. Before she married she was so young, you know, that I thought all those little childish ways would

be done away with afterwards; but they are not one bit. Oh, I have no patience with her!"

"She is young still," urged Maud, soothingly.

"Young! She's three years older than you: but she'll be young at sixty," said Blanche, scornfully; laying stress on the relative ages.

Maud, not knowing what to say, was silent.

"And there's Kate," went on Blanche presently: "I am beginning to think I did a most foolish thing to invite her here; but really, Maud, when you refused at that time I didn't know what I should do, for Stephen had a house full of *such* people—with servants, horses, and what not—that I feared his going to rack and ruin; so I was thankful to get any one he knew well—and liked, to clear the house in fact. You know he *must* have a companion always, and Kate answered the purpose, and amused him; but really I think now it would be as well for her to go—don't you?"

Maud's face glowed red.

"Yes," she replied, shortly and decidedly.

"But how to manage it?" pursued Blanche. "Kate is unimaginably difficult to deal with; you don't know 'where to have her.' I just hinted something about it, but she turned it all off in the most absurd style. I don't think she mentioned what I said to Stephen—indeed, I don't

see how she could; but it so happened that he was very bad about that time, and when one day I remonstrated with him a little, he flew into an awful fury, and told me to find a home elsewhere, and not interfere with him or his friends; that if I looked black at Kate, or bothered her, he would never speak to me again, and that Kate should always live at Forrestrange: that she had as good a right as anybody—meaning myself, I suppose; and so from that day to this I have never said anything more. It would not do the slightest good: and as for Florence! oh, I have no patience with her."

"Let us take a walk, Blanche; it is of no use discussing these things."

"But, Maud, I wish you would say something to Kate."

"We shall see: come, Blanche."

Wearily the day dragged on. Blanche said no more. After dinner, Stephen came up hilarious. Dinner was so late, that it was quite dark before he came into the drawing-room.

"Who'll go out on the terrace with me to keep me company, while I smoke my constitutional pipe?" he asked, clamorously. "Come,

Kate, you will, if everybody else won't," he added, and out they both went.

"It isn't at all a pleasant evening for being out of doors," observed Blanche, "the ground must be so damp; I've a great mind to call Kate in."

They had been gone some time now.

"Why should you, Blanche?" lisped Mrs. Forrester. "Miss Bryan never takes cold; and if she comes in, Stephen will come too, and he'll smell so strong of that horrid smoke."

"They'll both take cold; the ground must be so wet," persisted Blanche.

"I am sure I don't want Stephen to come in," pouted Mrs. Forrester.

Maud, without saying anything, left the room and went on the terrace, where she found Kate and Stephen sitting on the cedar-tree seat.

"Are you not afraid of the damp?" she asked, on joining them.

"And indeed you're right, it *is* damp," said Kate promptly: "I never thought of the damp before. We'd better be going in, maybe."

She jumped up and ran towards the house.

"Wait till I finish my pipe," shouted Stephen after her; but she was gone directly, and Stephen soon followed.

At tea there was something so nervous and

strange in Kate's manner, that Maud could not help thinking she resembled a child who knows it deserves punishment for a fault, but hopes to avert the punishment by extreme good conduct, there was such an anxiety to please in all she said or did; and although her manner when Maud came in with Stephen was embarrassed, this quickly went by, and was succeeded by what may be expressed as a general promptitude of behaviour. Nothing was lost on Maud.

"I am certain Kate dreads my seeing anything," she thought at the end of the evening. "How soon she was checked to-night! Her manner was quite different from what it was before."

There and then she made up her mind to talk to Kate.

"The sooner this trifling comes to an end the better. I am sure she will listen to what I say. I won't delay any longer: it is infinitely the best plan to do what I can at once; the task will only get harder and harder each day. Yes, I will go to her room to-night."

Having resolved thus, Maud felt quite hopeful.

"I do believe there is nothing beyond extreme folly; and indeed one ought not to be harsh: what extenuating circumstances there are!"

Everybody had retired, and the night hush

had settled on the house, when, candle in hand, Maud left her own room. The old squire was right: that end door caused a dreadful draught down the passage, and her candle went out directly she turned the corner; she had to return to relight it, and shaded it with her hand next time.

"Come in," came in reply to her low tap at Kate's door.

She entered.

"Oh, Miss Gwynne, can that be yourself!" exclaimed Kate. "Sure it's your ghost you most resemble: it's as pale as a sheet ye are! Is it the toothache now? and did ye come for brandy?"

"Thank you, I have no toothache."

"Is it the headache, then?"

"Oh, no! there is nothing the matter with me. I only came to—to talk a little."

"And thank ye kindly for the same."

Maud was so taken aback by Kate's manner, that she felt quite puzzled how to proceed. Kate presently broke the pause that followed, by asking,—

"Have ye anything that troubles ye, Miss Gwynne?"

"Yes; that is—I am sorry—anxious——"

She broke down.

"Ah! tell it out. What is it, then?"

"Nothing very particular—that is—nothing very serious."

"I'm particularly happy to hear it."

Again there was a short silence; which, again, Kate was the first to break, by asking Maud whether she "plaited her hair or put it into curls at night?"

Maud not replying immediately, Kate quickly entered into an explanation why curls were better than plaits, and proposed experimentalizing on Maud's hair forthwith.

"Will you go with me to Hafod?" asked Maud, suddenly.

"Heaven defend us!" cried Kate. "And what ever put that in your head? You're not for starting now, this minute, sure?"

"Oh, no: I only thought I should like you to go with me when I return."

"And when may that be?"

"Any time. Say this week, or next."

Kate shrugged her shoulders.

"Thank ye kindly, Miss Gwynne, but I've promised to stay here a good bit yet."

"Kate Bryan," began Maud, tenderly, "I doubt your being aware that perhaps it is better you should go with me."

"Better? Why, for sure?" asked Kate, becoming very brisk in accent.

"I am sure you have not thought of it," said Maud, gently; "but your being so much with Stephen Forrester may be commented upon. I want you to understand that you may be laying yourself open to remark: unthinkingly, I doubt not. Pray forgive me for speaking thus, but I should be so sorry for people to begin to talk."

"Talk! Do you think I care? And why shouldn't I be with him? Faith, isn't he very kind to me, and haven't we always been good friends?"

"Yes; oh, yes, I know that. But indeed I think it would be as well if you were to go away now."

"Thank ye kindly for the interest ye take in me; but I have not the least desire in life to cut me visit short."

"Oh, Kate! not when it is better you should?"

"Ah, are ye jealous then, Miss Gwynne?" said Kate, jocularly, nevertheless changing colour.

"Kate," said Maud, very tenderly, "you are turning what may affect you more seriously than you have ever imagined, into jest. If you will take the trouble to think it over, you will not impute any other motive than the real one to me."

"And what is the real motive, then?"

"To save you from pain."

"Pain? Sure then it's no pain at all to be at Forrestrange."

"Kate, surely it is not necessary for me to say more, than that a girl—a pretty girl like you—cannot be too careful in her conduct."

Kate smiled; and looking coy, said,—

"Maybe Mr. Stephen thinks me ugly."

Maud was shocked at Kate's flippant manner.

"Do not trifle in this way, Kate Bryan," she said, getting quite pale, whilst her hands worked nervously at the end of a ribbon she wore; "surely, when matters like this are spoken of, there ought to be a little serious attention paid. You don't know the effort it has been to me to come and speak to you."

"And why did ye, then? It would be far from me mind to give you such trouble."

"Because I would save you from what might follow——"

"Follow what? Ye're beyond me entirely," interrupted Kate, paling in the face.

"Trifling on dangerous ground. You can't be aware of what you are doing, indeed," faltered Maud.

"Ah, ye're getting cross, now."

"Kate, Kate! oh, *do* listen!" cried Maud, agitated. "If my words pain you, believe me

I only, by speaking, seek to save you from worse pain. Is it right for you to go on thus? You understand me; I know you do. Reflect, and ask yourself whether you are acting rightly?"

Maud looked much distressed, and spoke gently, but decidedly.

"I'm sure I don't know at all what ever I've done to draw down your anger: it isn't meself that can say. I'm sure I've never done you any harm," said Kate, hanging down her head, and speaking like a spoiled child.

"You have never done me any injury, Kate," said Maud; "neither do I believe you would do wrong knowingly. But things go on by little and little without your thinking; maybe for want of reflection, and then trouble comes. It is to save you from such a consequence that I have spoken. Do, do consider a little: this way of going on *cannot* lead to happiness."

Under the force and truth of Maud's words and the gentleness of her manner, Kate's flippancy at last gave way. She began nervously to finger a letter which happened to be on the toilet table, tearing it to pieces and plucking fragments away: presently she burst out crying.

"Well," said Maud, "there is no harm done, Kate; only be more careful for the future."

"I'm—sure," she sobbed, "it isn't meself that wishes to be ill thought of: what do you tell me to do?"

"Come with me to Hafod," said Maud.

Kate made no reply, but sobbed convulsively, with loud hysteric crying, resting her head on the table. Maud stood quiet by, yearning, praying, that all folly might pass away. They remained thus till a clock struck One, when Kate started up and ceased sobbing. Presently raising her head she glanced at the glass, and pushing back her hair, remarked,—

"What a fright I've made meself, sure!"

What two different faces the glass reflected: one pale, earnest, marked with anxiety and thought; the other flushed, careless, with a kind of blighted look on its beauty. Just then the candle began to flare in the socket.

"Sure then it's very late, and it's afraid I shall be to undress by meself and everybody asleep," said Kate, beginning to disrobe. "I always remember the stories of Banshees, if it is awake I am in the middle of the night. Don't ye go, Miss Gwynne; it's not many minutes I'll be before I am in bed. I'll say short prayer, so as not to keep ye waiting."

And a very short prayer Kate Bryan must have said, for Maud was not aware of any period during

which such act of devotion might have been performed.

"Well, you'll think of returning with me, won't you?" said Maud.

"Sure that's true. Good-night, Miss Gwynne."

"Good-night."

Maud shut the door softly, and groped her way in the dark to her own room.

She drew up the blind and looked out on the night. Thoughts of her distant home crowded on her, and she longed in her heart to be there again.

"I shall not weary of the sea any more: at least I think not. I partly understand to-night what Hugh meant: the sound haunts me now. Truly, as he said, it tells of the Eternal."

Her sleepless eyes wandered over the dark trees above the dim shadows to the starlit sky. "I understand, too, what he meant when he spoke of communing with nature: then it was a mystery to me. Yes; I feel how creation proclaims the All-powerful, the Unchangeable. These stars shone over paradise: Heaven's vault stretched over the earth when Eden's garden was dwelt in by sinless man. Then, as now, the heavens proclaimed the glory of God. Infinite love, infinite long-suffering, is told to us. Why do we keep our vision fixed on earthly, grovelling things; refusing to look upwards and onwards to

a radiant immortality, which immensity and its glories speak to us of? Yet for all God's wondrous works above and around us, we go on tortured, anguished, finding life a dreary waste; our passions, like night damps rising from the ground, shutting out the embracing, never-ending mercy from our sight. For all that, heaven is there, though the mists surrounds us and hide it. . . . . I see the river damp hanging over the low wood now, and I see the sky thick with ever-shining stars. Truly there is peace and consolation in communing with nature!"

So she thought. And she went on her knees and asked God for that peace which passeth all understanding. She prayed long and fervently, not for herself alone, but for all.

CHAPTER VI.

MAUD RETURNS TO HAFOD.

"Oh, thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be called by, let us call thee devil!"

As soon as Maud felt she could propose returning to Hafod without remark, she did so; and it was the end of the week following. Until that time, from the night she had been with Kate, there was nothing particular to note. Sometimes she would appear to Maud to be dejected; then this would suddenly vanish, and she would have a flow of quite wild spirits, running about, and doing everything for everybody with wonderful alacrity.

To-day the clouds were hanging low; there was no trace of summer brightness; the landscape was all gray, with neither sunshine nor shadow; it was a day on which the farmers hurried to carry the hay that was ready, or gathered it into large cocks against the rain which was near.

Maud had got Kate to walk down to the

Woodford meadows, where a score or two of haymakers were hard at work; but Kate was quite listless this morning, and took not the least interest in the busy scene.

"Papa will be glad to hear of the heavy crops," remarked Maud. "I must describe how wonderfully changed the alder lands are, when I go back: there is no trace of marsh anywhere."

"Have you fixed the day for going away?" asked Kate.

"I thought of Saturday: I want to be back at Hafod this week; then we shall see Hugh before he leaves."

"I am ready when you like, or sooner," said Kate.

"Then we'll say Saturday," said Maud, glad in her heart to fix the time; for she was painfully anxious to be gone: being at Forrestrange was utter misery to her.

She had seen enough to know that Kate ought not to be there: that, in itself, was sufficient to make her wish with all her heart to be gone; and she also saw, or fancied she saw, compunction and distress in Stephen's mind—that his conscience was not dead, and that if he had the power he would retrieve himself. She imagined this through all his loud intemperance; and she was right.

Stephen would have given the world to redeem the past. Every morning, as he lay awake tortured in mind, would he make resolves, which before night were all broken. Oh, yes! Stephen Forrester, drinking deep to drown thought, only heaped more and more torment on himself. Who saw his wretchedness like Maud? No one; for no one had loved him as she had, in the years that were gone: not with the love which usually blinds young ladies and young gentlemen to all but the beauty of their dears; but with the deep affection of a strong, true heart, which, the more it loves, the keener it is to perceive what is wanting in the one loved: like a guardian angel, ever seeking to save life's wanderer from going astray, yet ever, through watchfulness, having knowledge of that wanderer's least straying from the right path.

So Maud understood Stephen better than anyone else did in the world; and though that love was all gone, yet this knowledge still remained. She saw he was wretched; she saw he endeavoured to drown thought; and she guessed that if Kate were gone, it would be better: better for her, better, far better, for him.

"Shall you be ready on Saturday?" asked Maud.

"And that's true, or to-morrow if you like," replied Kate.

"But will it be hurrying you?" asked Maud, secretly rejoicing at Kate's ready acquiescence.

"Hurrying me? Not the least bit in life: sure it's no use waiting any longer at all. Let us go before the rain comes, for why wait till a rainy day?"

Kate looked at Maud and laughed: but there was a strange incomprehensible expression in her eyes, which made Maud feel quite uncomfortable; but Kate laughed so much that Maud laughed too, although she did not see the joke.

There was an end of the matter some days later, so Maud thought, when Stephen shut the railway carriage door, after bidding them good-by at Frorn, where he had driven them on their homeward journey; that is, Maud's homeward journey.

Kate was in the best possible spirits, and declared of all places in the world, she wished to visit Hafod; she was so fond of the big mountains and the roaring sea.

"Well," thought Stephen, as the train moved off (he was quite sober this morning), "it is better she should go with Maud,—Maud is a good woman. Yes, it's much better poor Kate should be friends with good people, for it *is* of

no use going on like this—hang it! Oh, by Jove, ain't Maud an angel, that's all!"

He sighed a great sigh, and turned away. Just then a stinging recollection came over him: a thought which gave him a sharp pang,—a vague, uncertain dread. The blood rushed to his temples, and he looked like a man who is hearing some astounding intelligence.

"Oh, hang it, no," he muttered, walking into the refreshment room; where, to do away with this new and unpleasant idea that had just occurred to him, he drank glass after glass of brandy and water, and then drove furiously home.

To Maud's disappointment and vexation, Hugh had left Hafod before she and Kate arrived. Mr. Gwynne could not imagine why he hurried so at the last; but go he must, before Sunday, so he told his father.

"And, Maud," said Mary, "Hugh said you must go to him very soon, very soon indeed, and I must take care of papa and Miss Bryan; and he said I could take as good care as you can: there, Maud."

CHAPTER VII.

WINTER COMES ON APACE.

"What is the life of man? is it not to shift from side to side, from sorrow to sorrow — to button up one cause of vexation, and unbutton another?"

Four months are gone. October brightness is dying; the waning woods foretell winter; dead leaves strew the woodlands, and decaying ferns lie dank on the ground. Kate is still at Hafod, and, to tell truth, Maud is sufficiently tired of her visitor, who, however, seems to cling to Maud as to a tower of strength.

Strange too! for there has never been one word of confidence between them. Stephen is never alluded to, and Philip is never named; and Kate consoles herself by thinking Maud knows nothing. And so the days pass: Kate showing an unwillingness to write home, or, indeed, do anything to interrupt this present life; and Maud, strong, trustful Maud, bearing all things, because "it is better Kate should be

here, until she makes it up at home; otherwise she might return to Forrestrange."

They walked out most days; one afternoon, however, Maud having taken cold, preferred remaining indoors. The weather was not tempting: a raw east wind swept down the barren hill-side, leaden clouds drove slowly on, dead leaves rustled down the roads, sand-drifts flew on the beach, and the breakers' spray dashed seawards. Not a sail was in sight; the east wind desolated the scene: it was a keen, uncomfortable day, and looked very like snow. Notwithstanding, Kate, who had lately taken to rambling, went, accompanied for a short way by Mary; who soon turned back, ready to cry with cold.

Kate pursued her walk to the glen—a glen in summer, green and lovely; with wild thyme and sweet herbage fringing the gray sides, up which ivy creeps and hangs in luxuriant masses. Here and there, in fissures of the rocks, the mountain-ash grows; it was laden with bright red berries last autumn, now the berries are gone, the trees leafless, and the ravine wild and wintry. The glen, save where the ivy creeps, is bare and rugged; and down the rocks at the upper end, the water tumbles into a deep, black pool, escaping from there, and rushing

foaming past the grim boulder stones, leaving many a withered branch on the wintry bank.

"Kate is long coming in," said Maud. "What can she be about?"

"She went for a walk," observed Mary; "but I came back because it was so cold."

Presently it began to snow, and still Kate did not come. Just before dark, Maud wrapped a shawl round her, and went in search. She walked quickly, and by-and-by came in sight of Kate sitting on the edge of the dark pool. She started up on Maud's approach, and ran to meet her, saying she had taken such a long walk and made herself so hot that she had been sitting on the grass, thinking it was summer instead of winter. "Wasn't it funny?" she asked, and burst out laughing.

But it was a strange laugh: a laugh that came from between bloodless lips; and it struck a chill to Maud's heart. However, she noticed nothing, only remarking that it was not fit to stay out any longer; and that it was far more conducive to health and happiness to be within doors now. They hurried home as fast as possible; where, by the blazing fire the colour soon came back to Kate's cheeks and lips, and the chill dispersed from Maud's heart; for Kate grew quite merry, and began telling Irish stories,

which ended in her giving an account of how they lived at Connomore formerly, and she laughed very much indeed at her own girlish tricks, and spoke of her aunt, and old Rose, and old Harry, and Philip.

"Why don't you write to your aunt?" asked Maud, when Kate's drollery had subsided.

"Write to her is it? maybe I will to-morrow."

"Do," said Maud, eagerly: "she must be so lonely by herself."

Kate darted a quick glance at Maud: a hard restless glance, just such as Maud had observed that first day at Forrestrange.

"By herself?" asked Kate. "How is it ye know that?"

"Oh, since your cousin Philip was wrecked here, we have heard from him; indeed seen him once or twice, and——"

"Sure he's not been saying anything about me unfortunate self?" asked Kate, quickly, with an attempt at playfulness.

"He is strongly attached to you, Kate," said Maud, gravely; "and you ought not to behave in this way to him. Of course this silence on your part must grieve both your aunt and him."

"Is that all?" said Kate, secretly exulting in thinking Maud knew no more; "then it's

mighty little trouble to make them happy on my account. I will write to-morrow."

So Maud grew very hopeful: indeed began to look forward to a reconciliation between Philip and Kate; for doubtless Philip would find he had exaggerated the evil. Oh, yes, all would come right. Blanche, too, wrote in good spirits. Stephen was much more careful than he used to be; and really his patience was wonderful: to please Florence, they were going abroad after Christmas; perhaps for a long time. Oh, yes, nothing further would come of that folly: there was an end to it for ever.

There came a reply to Kate's letter from old Mrs. Bryan. She said Philip had sailed round the world again; but if she had opportunity she would forward the letter to where he might find it, if not, keep it until he returned. In a postscript was added, "For all the trouble you have caused me and *him*, Kate, this is your home when you want one."

The days were near the shortest. Twilight closed in early—not fading into dark, for the ground was covered with snow. The sunset had been glorious, and Maud stood watching the crimson and purple fires in the sky, until they

paled, and the great moon solemnly rose above the far horizon.

"And, indeed, I must get a taste of this frosty air," said Kate, quitting the room as Maud drew her attention to the glorious evening picture.

Presently, when the moonlight night alone was visible, all effects of colour gone, and the scene without chilling, Maud closed the shutters, stirred the fire, and lighted the candles; having done which, she rang for tea.

Any meal these days was an all-important ceremony, for Maud was instructing a new damsel in the mysteries of laying the table and waiting thereat, Susan having been transferred to Westcliffe, to be housemaid at the rectory. Her successor at Hafod is Nancy of the red hair, one of Maud's school-girls, to whom knives and forks are *de trop*. She cannot be made to comprehend why it is necessary plates, dishes, salt-cellars, spoons, knives and forks should be placed in order; in her ideas they are quite as handy in a general heap in the middle of the table as elsewhere. So when tea comes, Maud has to bring her mind to bear on this heap; Nancy regarding these small matters as vexatious and frivolous.

When at last the table is laid, the little bright kettle steaming on the hob, and the tea made, Maud begins to wonder what has become of Kate,

and sends Nancy out in search; who, after the manner of her species, utters the most extraordinary hootings whilst endeavouring to effect this purpose. Finding these sounds fail in obtaining a response, she returns to Maud with the announcement,—

"It iss impossible to find her: see iss nowhere;" on hearing which, Maud throws a shawl over her head and runs out.

The earth is one sheet of white, except where perpendicular rocks rise dark above the snow. Maud goes straight towards the glen; where by the pool at the top, now ice-bound, all but a rift which the falling water keeps open, sits Kate.

"Kate," she exclaimed, "what can you be thinking of? Really, it is out of all common sense to sit there, with the frost freezing your very breath. Come, don't be so nonsensical. Come home. What is the matter? are you moonstruck?"

Maud was thoroughly provoked, for Kate had not offered to move, only lifting her large eyes to Maud's and asking,

"And how did ye find me out?"

"Come home: I can't stop shivering here," said Maud, in a pet.

"Oh, I like to look at the running water," said Kate. "Don't you know in that same song you

sing sometimes, how it says that running streams will take you where the sinless angels are? and——"

"Well, come in now, Kate; I will sing it for you by-and-by," said Maud.

When they got indoors, letters had come from the post. One addressed to Maud in a big round hand puzzled her extremely; she turned it over and over, as people invariably do on these occasions, wondering: for the post-mark was indistinct. At last she opened it; it was a communication from Susan at Westcliffe. Maud's heart stood still almost as she read.

"Please, ma'am, master, that is Mister Hugh, is very ill, I sent for a doctor. The doctor calls it inflammation of the lungs, and told me to send for you. Please, ma'am, will you come to-morrow?

"Your faithful servant,

"SUSAN."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BITTER SEASON.

"Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
But he neglected nought for rain or thunder:
In sickness and in grief to visit all,
The farthest in his parish, great and small."

THREE weeks are passed. Unweariedly during that time has Maud watched at Hugh's bedside; watched whilst life and death fought. Now the wearing anxiety, the racking dread is over; and Hugh is pronounced out of danger. "But he must be very careful—very careful indeed," the doctor says; "for no doubt there is a tendency to pulmonary affection: which, however, may be warded off by extreme care." This he tells Maud.

After a few more days, Hugh gets up from bed, terribly wasted; so thin and weak! but recovers strength wonderfully, once having risen; and in another day or two goes downstairs, avowing

himself perfectly well. The next Sunday is so fine that, spite of all remonstrance, he will go to church. Right glad are the people to see him pass up the aisle; but he is not able to do any duty yet, and is much fatigued before the service is over. By the evening, however, he recovers, and Maud has much ado to keep him from going to church again. Good people can be quite as provoking as bad. But when next Sunday comes, he feels so well, that he insists on helping Mr. Johnson; and is so little tired, that on Monday morning he gives Mr. Johnson a few days' holiday.

Maud hitherto has heard regularly from Kate. In her last letter she spoke of returning to Ireland some time this month. To-day no letter from Kate; but one from Mrs. Pritchard, original and hard to decipher.

"I hope, dear missy, when you receive these few lines you and Master Hugh will be finding yourselves tolrubble, as we are at present; praise God for all his mercies and the antibilious pills, which I always keep on hand. Master's love and the little one's ditto, and they long to see you very much; and Miss Bryan went on Saturday, and no loss, for she moped shocking after you were gone; tired of this quiet place, I reckon, and is not well neither, I take it; but it were

no manner of use my asking her anything, she is so laughing-like; but she will write, she said, and tell us how she got home to Ireland in a week or two. Master come down to see us in the kitchen most evenings, for the little one goes fast asleep over the reading, and, poor master! it's dull dreadful for him. Nancy come on very well only ruff; capital good washer and ironer is Susan, a good girl. It is time for master's tea, so no more from

"DOROTHY PRITCHARD.

"P.S.—Is Master Hugh careful of himself? Make him be, missy, especial when this fair weather comes to an end, as I think it is for doing, for my corn aches dreadful."

Mrs. Pritchard's prognostications proved correct. First a sudden mildness came in the air and the frost thawed rapidly, not only during the day but through the night; it was sloppy and miserable everywhere. Then the wind, which had fallen to the south, veered round by west to the north, and blew furiously; scattering the heavy, formless clouds which curtained the sky, and driving them flying in great jagged masses over the horizon. It was bitterly cold, and the sun which shone out between the driving clouds for a moment at a time, had no warmth in its

rays. The wind was piercing, and drove stinging hail showers down slantways; people who were out turned their backs to the storm, looking blue and pinched with cold. In the village the houses smoke dreadfully; "it allers druv down the chimney in this wind," say the cottagers. The baby in the cradle sneezes and awakes roaring; the children in the smoke are in a state of chronic naughtiness, crying and screaming incessantly; the mothers coax to begin with, and end by slapping: everything is as miserable as it can be.

"I hope Mr. Johnson will return to-day, Hugh," observed Maud; "for, should anything be wanted, the weather is not fit for you to stir out."

"I don't think anything will be wanted; there is nobody very ill: to-morrow it may be fine," said Hugh. "But really, Maud, I am quite well now, and feel equal to anything."

"Please, sir," interrupted Susan, putting her head in at the door, "here's Mrs. Lobb wanting to see you, in the kitchen."

"Ask her to go into the study."

"No, no, Hugh," said Maud; "have her in here. You must not go into the study to-day; it smokes dreadfully."

"Oh, laws! the clean drugget!" exclaimed Susan,

disappearing. Mrs. Lobb presently knocked, having satisfied Susan there should be no wet track up the stairs on the clean drugget, by taking her shoes off in the kitchen and shaking herself well from the hailstones which gemmed her.

"By your leave, sir," said Mrs. Lobb, dropping a curtsey at the door, "and, miss, I beg pardon for coming on such a day, but I'm troubled in my mind."

"Come in, Mrs. Lobb," said Hugh; "you were quite right: what is the matter?"

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Lobb, closing the door and advancing into the room, "I must beg your pardon for troubling you."

"Oh, never mind, sit down; what is it?"

"Last night, sir, as I was just going to bed, earlier than usual, I heard a loud knocking. Thinks I, it's Peggy White; and so I put my gown on, and to the door drek'ly. You see Solomon was out with some singing. But instead of Peggy White's girl, it was Nelly the Wheatsheaf out of breath. 'Nelly,' says I, 'come up this minute.' 'Mrs. Lobb,' says she, 'there's a gen'l'man and lady just come in, and the lady's ill, and the gen'l'man is like struck stark starin' mad, and missis begs of you to come this minute, for the doctor isn't at home.'

"So I went, and in less than an hour there was a

baby; but such a poor little thing that I thought it was dead: it never cried nor moved. And the gentleman was walking in the room below, as if he was demented, so by and by I slipped out to tell him the lady was all right, but that I was afeard the baby would die.

"Then he said, choking like, 'Nurse, we are on our way abroad—will you take care of the baby, till we ask or send for it?"

"'Oh, sir,' said I, 'not much care will be wanted: I never saw so weakly a baby; I don't think it can live an hour.'

"'Anyhow,' said he, 'take the child; whether it dies or not you shall be well paid;' and with that he took out a purse, and counted me out twenty pounds, all in sovereigns.

"I was too astonished to speak: I never had so much money in my hand before.

"'What's the matter?' said he. 'Does it not satisfy you?'

"I told him it more than satisfied me, but that I didn't think it honest to take it if the child died.

"'Don't drive me wild,' said he; 'take the child; that's all I want: if it dies you are paid; if by any chance it should live you will be paid hereafter. Be as careful of it as if it were your own: take it away, you will be well paid.'

"'Sir,' said I, 'will you give me a token in case the child——'

"'Token?' said he, 'what do you mean?'

"'Well, sir, anything—that ring.'

"Before I could finish my say, he had taken it off and thrown it on the table; but before I went out of the house the child's face was turning all manner of colours, and I told the gentleman that I knew it never could live."

"But is it alive?" asked Hugh.

"Yes, sir, and that's all; I almost expect to find it dead when I get back: Ann Claver is taking care of it just now."

"I will come and baptize it immediately," said Hugh, rising.

"Oh, laws! sir, you shall do no such a thing!" cried Mrs. Lobb, rising too. "It's no manner of use putting a name on it; the poor little thing is safe to be dead before night."

"Let us go at once," said Hugh.

"You mustn't come on any considerations, sir! If it lives, another time will do; and if it dies—well, it won't want a name."

"Come, Mrs. Lobb."

Hugh went out of the room without another word. Mrs. Lobb followed, first of all saying she would never have come up to the rectory if she had known; but that, having gone to the Wheat-

sheaf to see the lady, and to her amazement and consternation finding both lady and gentleman gone, she really felt the responsibility of what she had undertaken to be so great that she couldn't help coming on to Mr. Gwynne.

"Oh, Hugh, must you go?" pleaded Maud, running downstairs after him.

"It is my duty, dear; I must," he answered, seriously. She wound a comforter round his neck, and helped him on with his waterproof. "I shan't get wet; don't be anxious," he said; he stooped and kissed her forehead and went.

Maud from the doorstep watched him down the lawn. Just before he turned the corner, a pelting shower came on; he put down his head and walked on more quickly, and Maud was driven indoors by the stinging hail.

He was absent for a longer time than she anticipated. However, at last he came back, not in the least wet, he said; only Maud insisted his shoes were damp, and compelled him to submit to a change of stockings as well.

"Was the baby dead, Hugh?" she asked, as he stood on the hearth rug, leaning on the chimney-piece.

"Baby? no."

"Is it going to die?"

"Die? yes—no—that is, it is impossible to say."

"Indeed, perhaps it will live after all.

"Live, after all," he vaguely said.

"What name was it christened by?"

"Name?"

Maud looked up; she was seated on the rug at his feet: she could not understand this abstracted way of speaking.

"Hugh, what makes you so absent?" she asked.

"Absent? am I absent?"

"Yes."

He was deadly pale, paler even than when he came downstairs after his illness, and was looking vaguely at the fire, apparently unconscious of Maud's questions.

"Hugh, do tell me the name?" asked Maud, springing up and facing him.

"The name of the poor baby? I baptized it by the name of John."

"John? oh, I hate the name; was there no clue to a surname? It's a queer business, isn't it, Hugh?"

A red flush came over his face, but it soon faded. Then a violent fit of coughing attacked him, leaving a pain in his side, which caught his breath.

"You have that pain again, Hugh,—I know you have; oh, dear, I am so sorry!"

"It is nothing, Maud; very trifling: it will stop soon. I think I will lie down; I feel rather tired."

Maud wheeled the sofa up, and he lay on it, closing his eyes as if indisposed to talk. There was an expression of anguish on his face; the same kind of look Maud had seen before, when he stood in the moonlight on the shore at Hafod, mourning over human misery. The pain in his side continued: it lasted all the afternoon. He became hot and feverish, shivering occasionally in every limb; his hand burned like fire, and his eyes were heavy, and encircled with dark rings. When he attempted to stand he would have fallen, but for Maud; who got him to go to bed at last, and then sent for the doctor.

But before he came Hugh began talking incessantly, while Maud, in utter wretchedness, sat beside his bed. He began to ramble in his talk; going back to long past years, sometimes in whispers, but oftenest in a hoarse, jerking tone. He was a boy at school, and was urging Stephen Forrester to write his Latin verse; Stephen was idle, and would not, and Hugh at the last moment, in scrambling haste, his fingers working rapidly at the sheet meanwhile, did it for him.

Again, Hugh was at Woodford; Maud and

Stephen were out riding, and he was trying to overtake them. Here he started up in bed; but Maud held him back. Then he burst into a loud laugh—a laugh that made her shudder all over; it rang through the room as the doctor came in.

"What's this? what's this?" he asked, hurrying to her assistance.

Hugh exhausted himself by struggling, and presently only muttered incoherently, falling back heavily.

"Did you ever see an attack of this kind before?" asked Dr. Goodruff; "in his case it is new to me."

"Never, never," cried Maud. "Oh, Hugh, darling, what has happened to make you like this?"

Dr. Goodruff was a grey-headed man, with a rough manner and tender heart. He had recourse now to a pinch of snuff, but he spilled half; then he put his ear to Hugh's chest, tapping it with his hand, and afterwards felt the patient's head and pulse.

"Is he very ill?"

The doctor pulled out his watch, to mark the pulse.

"High fever," he said, abruptly.

Maud clasped her hands despairingly.

"What brought it on? Do you know?" asked the doctor.

"He went out this morning, and, I am afraid, caught cold."

"Humph! You had better write to your relations; some one must come to your help: I am afraid it is a serious case, my dear."

Maud was almost choking with grief.

"Is he—so very—bad then?"

"Strong excitement—too much for his weak state—intense nervous excitement. Have you no idea what caused it, my dear?"

"I don't know whether he heard anything to agitate or affect him this morning when he was away."

"Madness to go. Cold will account for lungs—but not for this," tapping his forehead with his finger. "Some upset somewhere—strong excitement affecting the whole nervous system: quite a new symptom—have attended him, off and on, for more than a year—never saw it before."

* * * * *

CHAPTER IX.

REST.

"There was only the sound of weeping
From watchers around a bed,
But rest to the weary spirit,
Peace to the quiet dead."

THE wind fell, after that day of icy storms: on the mountain tops and in rocky crevices snow still was seen, but from the slopes and lowlands it had disappeared. The pools froze over at night, but thawed again in the bright sunshine, and it became still, clear weather. Hugh had now quite recovered consciousness, and all fever was gone. At twilight, everything being very quiet, the house hushed, Maud heard a low, distant, undefined sound: it was the ground swell after the recent storm on the shore, thundering over the huge boulders, and rolling into the clefts and dark caverns three miles from Westcliffe.

"How plain it sounds to-night, Maud: ever the same—Eternity!"

Hugh had been lying quite still, listening. His voice was very faint, but he was better; oh, much better, he said.

"You are quite free from pain to-night, Hugh?"

"Quite, dear: I am so comfortable. Don't you hear the sea, Maud?"

"Yes, the swell has not gone down yet."

His wasted hands were folded, and he looked perfectly happy: there was the same divine expression in his face Maud had seen before.

"Papa will be here soon," she observed. "I am so thankful to be able to tell him you are so much better."

"Much better: quite well, only a little weak, you know, Maud." His voice was very faint, and on his high white forehead the perspiration stood in drops.

"Are you inclined to sleep, Hugh?"

"Oh, no, I am only waiting; my father is very long coming."

Again he closed his eyes. The thin hands, which were almost always clasped together, now unloosed and he began to pick at the coverlid rapidly.

"Do you want anything?" asked Maud, bending down, taking his hand in hers.

"Flowers—the spring flowers in my mother's garden. Why do they let the weeds grow? She

won't like to see them—let me pull them up—she's coming."

"Hugh, darling——"

He opened his eyes and looked bewildered; but only for a moment. "I was dreaming," he said. "Such a strange dream, Maud. I thought I was at home, in my mother's garden; she was coming, and I saw the weeds, and tried to pull them up. I was in such a hurry, for I wanted to run to meet her, as I used. Hark! there's my father."

The noise of wheels, not heard by Maud when he spoke, now became distinguishable.

"Go and meet him, Maud; bring him here; tell him how well I am: go quickly."

She did as he desired, and Mr. Gwynne went up at once.

"Dear father!"

"Hugh, my dear boy!"

"He is so much better to-night, papa, and is so glad you are come," said Maud.

"Your hand is very thin, Hugh; you must have had a very severe attack. Did it begin with influenza? I have just had that myself."

"You are well now, papa?" asked Maud.

"Yes, my dear; as well as I can be with my affliction."

"What affliction?" asked Hugh, in a vague way, again picking at the bedclothes.

"Oh, my boy, have you forgotten?"

Hugh took no notice, drowsily turning his head aside, and Mr. Gwynne looked hurt.

"He doesn't remember; he has been so ill, papa," whispered Maud.

"Is his memory affected, my dear?" demanded Mr. Gwynne.

"Hush, papa! I think he will sleep a little."

For the next few minutes there was a heavy silence in the room, broken only by the ticking of Mr. Gwynne's watch; which he always carried, and invariably wound up, in his blindness, every night. The sound of the sea again swelled in the silent evening.

Hugh moved restlessly, his hair fell over his damp forehead. Maud gently pushed the dark locks back.

"Thank you, dear; what time is it? I have slept so refreshingly."

"I fear I woke you."

"Oh, no! I have been awake some time listening to the sea. Isn't my father very long coming?"

"Hugh, my boy, don't you remember I am here?" cried Mr. Gwynne, groping towards him.

* * * * *

All Westcliffe knew, the servants in the house

knew, the very school-children knew, all except Mr. Gwynne and Maud knew, that the saintly Hugh Gwynne was dying.

All the evening anxious inquiries have been made at the rectory, and the weeping servants have only the same answer for all. The inquirers turn mutely away, with solemn sad faces, and meet others, who yet hurry up to the house, vainly hoping there may be better news for them.

The old dog Pompey lies at the door of Hugh's room; they must let him be there, for when shut up elsewhere, he howls piteously. He lets people step over him, without any notice; but each time Maud comes and goes he makes an attempt to wag his shaggy tail, flopping it heavily on the floor. The night is advancing, the pale crescent moon is going down in the cloudless sky; the lights in the village are being put out, and the last inquirers are turning homewards, excepting Solomon Lobb and his wife, who linger yet.

In Hugh's room are Mr. Gwynne and Maud. He has been sleeping again, but now moves restlessly and awakes.

"Is it late?" he whispers, looking up.

"Not very."

"Father, is that you? give me your blessing."

Mr. Gwynne groped forward, and Hugh suddenly raised himself and bent his head. Maud placed her father's hand on it, and he said,—

"Thy Father in Heaven bless thee, my boy!" and then he turned from the bed overcome. As he felt before him, making uncertain steps towards the door, Hugh said,—

"Oh, my father, would that I could have borne thine infirmity! Our Father bless thee also!" and then lay down, breathing rapidly. Again he sank into sleep, but awoke as Mrs. Pritchard came in.

"Mammy? you were always good to me: thank you. Are you tired, Maud? Stay with me to-night."

"Yes, darling. Mammy, you shall nurse to-morrow; you must rest now after your journey."

"Yes, to-morrow," repeated Hugh.

So Mrs. Pritchard went, and Hugh lay clasping Maud's hand. By the dim light Maud saw his lips move. There were no words, but she knew he was praying. Presently he spoke.

"Will you all partake of the holy communion with me to-morrow? It may be for the last time, here."

"Hugh, you break my heart!"

"Mourn not: is not heaven near, and the holy Saviour?"

He paused as if to commune silently, and his countenance became radiant, just as if a ray of divine glory fell on him lying there.

"I will send for Dr. Goodruff," said Maud, in a frightened whisper.

"Oh, no; I have no pain—there is nothing to be done. I may be here for many days: be not alarmed, Maud, to-night——. But I am fast going home."

Maud tried to hope he was wandering; anything rather than that he was speaking calm words.

"Try to sleep again," she said; "you will feel so much stronger afterwards."

What an aching she had at her heart as she said this!

He made no answer, but closed his eyes and lay still.

* * * * *

"Is it dawn yet?"

She rose and went to the window. A faint yellow light glimmered in the eastern sky.

"Yes—the day is breaking."

"Draw the blind up; thank you, Maud."

Stronger grew the light, clearer became the dark yew-trees against the morning sky.

"I should like to sit up — help me; ah, so."

She arranged the pillows, and helped to support him, and he sat there long, his eyes fixed on the glowing sky.

"Maud, it is glorious. Let them bury me where the light falls earliest in the churchyard; you know where—beyond the chancel: there is room. I know; I have looked: you will find the place. Nay, Maud, do not grieve—for me—for those who are taken, but weep, pray for those who fall, who sink in the heat of the day: weep for them, dear sister; entreat for them: pray day and night for poor erring sinners, and ask God to have mercy. Never weary, Maud; but weep not for me—I shall be at rest."

He was very agitated, the flush mounting over his pale face, and the drops standing out on his white forehead.

"Maud, there is yet one thing. I thought to die without adding a new sorrow to you; but it weighs on me. Had I lived I would have borne the burden; but now it is better you should know: you must bear it in secret, Maud, that none may know besides."

He stopped a moment from failing breath.

"I shall be better when I have said all—Maud, if I had lived I would have watched

over that little child. Will you, instead, and when it gets old enough, take it, if you can. I would have done so—for, Maud—" his voice sank into a hoarse whisper, "the ring — I made Mrs. Lobb give it to me, she never knew of the inscription inside—is in the secret drawer in my desk ——"

He broke down, bursting into tears; the first Maud had ever seen him shed in her life. He tried hard to go on, but an inarticulate sound came. The tears flowed faster and heavier: tears shed for transgression. Another choking sob, another, and he fell back on the pillow. Hugh had breathed his last.

The sun rises above the eastern horizon, flooding the rectory yew-trees with light. The house is astir, but the sick chamber is so still, that they are in hopes Hugh is asleep, until Mrs. Pritchard cautiously opens the door and enters. The curtains are withdrawn from the window, and the sunlight falls on the bed, on Maud on her knees at the bedside clasping Hugh's lifeless hand. The bright sun shines on the still, pale face of the dead brother, and on the insensible form of the fainting sister. Mrs. Pritchard utters a loud cry, and the old dog who came into the room with her tries to lick Maud's hand.

The rest of the household hurry in. They unclasp Maud from the dead and carry her away; they lay her on her own bed, where she lies so deathlike, that little Mary who sits on mammy's knee beside the couch, asks in a whisper, "Is Maud gone with Hugh, mammy?"

And Mr. Gwynne gropes round the bed in a purposeless kind of way, and querulously asks,

"Why don't you do something for her, Dolly Pritchard? she must have some help: you might do something I should think," and finding the head of the bed he leans over her and presently says, "She breathes evenly, Dolly—listen." Then he says—"Maud, my dear, cannot you rouse? Do try, my dear: it makes me so wretched to see you in this way."

But Maud is stunned; she neither sees nor hears, she neither weeps nor moans, and so the day wears on. And when Hugh is in his coffin, the desolate father gropes his way there: "Just to feel the boy's forehead, since I cannot see him," he says, when Mrs. Pritchard finds where he has gone and follows.

* * * * *

The days pass, and Hugh Gwynne is carried to his grave.

"Let them sing when I am buried, Maud," he

had said not long ago. "Let them sing from the house to the church-yard porch, and again when the burial is over."

So the children sang; for the singers broke down, when the body was brought out and laid on the bier: they sang from the rectory to the porch. And Maud, who had been lying with her face to the wall, conscious only that Hugh was dead, and that never more might she see him on earth, heard the fresh voices of the little singers. And when Mr. Gwynne in his deep mourning was led back from the grave, where they sang the anthem Hugh loved in his life, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth," Maud met him at the door; for when she heard the children's voices, she rose and dressed herself.

* * * * *

Truly there is suffering in the world. Maud's had been so grievous, that all thought seemed swept away. She had not once recurred in idea to what Hugh was trying to say when he breathed his last: "Hugh was dead:" that was all.

Now, no other hand shall touch what was his. She collects his scattered books and papers; these last she will put up in his desk. She remembers about the ring for the first time as she opens the secret drawer; there it lies. It is exactly like

one with which she is familiar: she glances inside.

Oh, yes! she knows it well. It is the mourning ring Stephen Forrester had always worn since his father's death.

CHAPTER X.

THE TIDE TURNS.

"Crack the lawyer's voice,
That he may never more false title plead."

More than two years are over and gone. Years in which heavy, feverish nights have been succeeded by wretched, hopeless days. Nights that bring to Maud dreams of Hugh yet alive and well; of the old squire on his deathbed; of Stephen near, yet ever separated by some stupendous obstacle; of past life, of past days; of happiness crushed, overwhelmed even in flying dreams.

Years in which heaviness has come in the evening, hopelessness in the morning. Days dragging on to weeks; weeks to months, months to years; with ever the same ache at the heart, ever the same sense of void in life.

White as rigid statuary Maud became. Had she possessed a less strong constitution, her

terrible grief must have destroyed her health; and she would have sunk, died of a broken heart, as the phrase is. But she was endued with wonderful physical powers; and although in her anguish, food for months had been almost loathsome, and she had wasted to a shadow, she never succumbed from performing the daily duties of life, or never said she felt anything but quite well.

Often in the night when her tearless agony was insupportable, she asked God to let her die—let her follow Hugh. Then her blind father mourning, helpless, would arise in her mind, and despairing, wretched, she would moan aloud, "Why, why were we born!"

But the sea ever sounded as a voice from the silent land, "Eternity."

At last she hears, at last she listens, in the silent night, in the lonely day; above the tones of the wind, above the howling blast, she hears it: ever there, but unheeded till now. As to a message from the departed, she now listens, and with strong crying sobs,—"Yes, darling, I hear, I remember. The sea told you to prepare for eternity, it tells me so now; O Father, grant me patience; strengthen my faith, do away with this despair!"

It is summer, burning, breezeless, cloudless

weather; the heat is dreadful; haze pales the midday blue. The sea shimmers, dead calm, beneath the hot atmosphere. Only of an evening when the sun has gone down, and a light land-breeze springs up, can Maud take her father out. Then they usually go down to the beach, returning to sleep, or try to sleep, with all the windows at Hafod wide open.

Notwithstanding the heat to-day, a visitor at noon arrived, a neat, dapper, little man, clean shaven and trim.

"Mr. Rolands!" exclaimed Maud.

"Miss Gwynne? surely, can it be?" asked the little man hesitatingly.

"Yes, I am your old friend, Maud Gwynne, Mr. Rolands," replied Maud, shaking hands.

"Eh? Well, changes happen to us all—dear me!"

"Oh, yes—I have not seen you for six years, Mr. Rolands."

"Just so; you were a fine young girl then; dear me, what spirits you had; dear me; how's Mr. Gwynne?"

"Better than he's been for a long while; he is getting used to his blindness now, and is more cheerful."

"Ah! I came all the way on purpose to see him."

"Mr. Rolands," she said suddenly alarmed, dreading some new trouble; "perhaps you may not be aware that all business goes through my hands to papa. If there is anything unpleasant, we will hide as much as we can from him."

"Nothing at all unpleasant, eh? look here," he produced a dirty looking parchment from his pocket, and patted it affectionately; "but I'll say nothing about it, till I've had something to eat; excuse me, but I am hungry."

Maud smiled, reassured by his manner, rang the bell and ordered luncheon. Susan quickly brought it in, and very tempting it looked—pink, cold salmon, fresh salad, yellow grass butter, half hidden by the green curled parsley, and new bread with a preponderance of kissing crust.

"Excellent, thank you, just what I like," said Mr. Rolands, in reply to Maud's request that he would help himself, as she left the room to fetch her father.

"Papa," she said, "Mr. Rolands from Frorn is below; you will be glad to see him, won't you?"

"Rolands! What brought him? Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Oh, no."

"There must be something wrong, Maud: is

De Lisle going to raise his mortgage? If there's more trouble coming I can't stand it, I cannot indeed."

He began to grope about the room; she took his hand.

"There is nothing wrong, papa; do not agitate yourself, I am sure of it."

"Are you sure?" he turned his blind eyes upon her, and stopped.

"Yes, quite; Mr. Rolands looks so cheerful; I think he has some good news, on the contrary. Come down, papa."

They went. Mr. Rolands, at bread and butter and salmon, jumped up.

"My dear sir, my very dear sir," further speech was inconvenient, inasmuch as his mouth was full.

"Rolands, you don't bring me bad news?"

The little man, to the peril of his swallow, gulped down his mouthful, and hastily replied,

"My dear sir, far from it, very far from it."

"Then I'm glad to see you."

Mr. Gwynne smiled, but such a heartbroken smile that, to put an end to his anxiety, Mr. Rolands went straight to the point at once.

"My dear sir, you know I always urged you to move for another trial in the case of Cheetham *v.* Gwynne; you know that?"

"So you did; I had no means, no ready money, you know that."

"So you said, my dear sir. I could have advanced the money; you know that."

"In case of failure I should have been a pauper; you know that."

"Failure? no chance of failure, in my opinion; you know that."

"So you said, Rolands; the Court of Chancery said otherwise; you know that."

"Court of Chancery be—dished (excuse me, Miss Gwynne). We'll go to the judicial committee, my dear sir."

"Rolands, do you recollect that I haven't a farthing to spare—that absolutely I have no means of fighting against the verdict."

"The best of means, my dear sir—right and proof!"

"Ah? Where is the proof?"

"Here, my dear sir, here, feel it, take it into your hand; isn't it glorious?"

The little man was quite excited, and doubled Mr. Gwynne's hands over the parchment.

"Yes, my dear sir, this will bring the whole to light!"

"You don't say so!"

"I do. Not to lose time by detailing how I got this into my possession, I will simplify the

matter to you. By this document, what I always was convinced of is proved. Maria Hawke, now Cheetham, from the time of coming of age, had power to act without let or hindrance; she had absolute control over her property. Only until she was twenty-one had the trustees authority. Now, my dear sir, Mrs. Cheetham was thirty when she realized; the speculation failed, and her husband brought an action against the "negligent trustees" (fraudulent and nefarious transaction, my dear sir). This document, suppressed, hidden, I accidentally discovered—it is the codicil to old Hawke's will. And, my dear sir, the former verdict will be set aside now; you will recover your lost property, with interest on the same; the other party will be condemned on every point, costs and all; you will be a rich man, and I shall be made for life. There—is that bad news?"

Mr. Rolands took the parchment and hugged it, his eyes twinkling with glee. "Never been out of my possession, my dear sir, day or night, since I found it—glorious proof! glorious proof!"

"Rolands," said Mr. Gwynne presently, "do you mean to say that there is a chance of my recovering my income?"

"Chance, my dear sir? certainty. Absolute certainty."

Mr. Gwynne's lip trembled—he felt for Maud; clasping her shoulder he cried, "Do you hear, my dear?"

"Indeed," said the lawyer facetiously, "Miss Gwynne, I am at your feet already. Will you believe in the disinterested devotion of your adorer, and accept his suit?"

"When you have finished your salmon, I may listen to you," replied Maud, laughing.

"True, my dear Miss Gwynne, my mouth will not admit of eloquence and salmon, simultaneously."

Mr. Gwynne sighed.

"If my poor boy had lived!"

"Life and death is under the control of One who gives what is best," remarked Mr. Rolands.

A silence fell on Mr. Gwynne and Maud. Mr. Rolands saw the cloud, munched away for a few moments, then said,

"Now really, Miss Gwynne, will you listen?"

"If you have done, not otherwise," said Maud, with an effort at gaiety.

"I have done. Will you credit me for adoring you? will you believe that there are no considerations but purest affection? Of course I know nothing of the some thousands a year that will fall to your lot, oh, dear no; none but the basest of mankind are thus influenced, we

know that. I am actuated by love alone, dear Miss Gwynne, therefore, accept my suit."

Maud laughed.

"You may laugh, but take care of yourself," said Mr. Rolands, gravely. "I have only represented a principle much in the ascendant just now. Don't throw yourself away, that's all; depend on it you may pick and choose pretty much as you like."

Maud smiled again.

"Poor old Woodford! You really think we shall get back there, Rolands?" said Mr. Gwynne.

"Whenever you choose to give notice to your tenants, my dear sir."

"Do you hear, Maud! You shall live there again, at Woodford, my dear, your rightful home, amongst your early friends—think, Maud!"

"Yes, papa." She tried to speak cheerfully, but was never nearer crying in her life. Any reference to the past brought inexpressible pain along with it.

"By-the-by," said Mr. Rolands, "your old friends the Forresters are in sad trouble; a fever has broken out there, some of the servants have died, and many of the villagers. This hot weather spreads it terribly. I heard, in passing through the village yesterday, or rather the day before, that there's quite a panic—they

can't get nurses for the sick. Mrs. Forrester is not at home, happily, but the child is laid up with it. Doubtless, Forrester and his sister would have left too, but of course they can't now the child is attacked. Mrs. Forrester is not strong, they say," there came a glint in his eye. "Weak constitution, very weak indeed, I understand."

"Then, Rolands, you are confident of winning this?" asked Mr. Gwynne, who had no thought for anything else just now.

"Undoubtedly, you will be back at Woodford before the year's out, everything repaid to you or decreed to be paid. I shall set to work directly after the long vacation."

CHAPTER XI.

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS.

"He bade me tell it:
Whereof I spoke of most disastrous chances."

Before this very hot day ended, another visitor came to Hafod. They were at tea; it was dusk, and Mr. Rolands was descanting on the virtuous properties of the beverage, his cup having been replenished for the sixth time, when they heard loud exclamations of surprise. They had no time for conjecture; a heavy step crossed the flagged hall, and a dark figure entered unannounced. He stood at the door without speaking, until Mary started up, and ran to the stranger, exclaiming, "Dr. Bryan, I declare!"

"Are you the only one who remembers me, Mary?" He stooped and kissed her.

"Don't do that, your beard pricks; it did long ago too," she said, rubbing her face.

How surprised they all were! He was welcomed warmly and introduced to Mr. Rolands, who glanced at Maud.

"This is an old friend of mine, Bryan," said Mr. Gwynne. "He brought me good news to-day. There is a probability of my recovering what I lost."

"You don't say so! Shake hands, sir!" to Rolands.

"With pleasure, sir."

The two stood and shook hands over the table. Mr. Rolands winced, for his hand was small and soft, and Philip's large and hard, and the great hand gripped the lesser tremendously.

"Pleasure in making your acquaintance, sir."

Mr. Rolands could not reply suitably, for his compressed hand hurt him dreadfully: the blood did not return to it for five minutes.

"And where did you come from, Bryan?" asked Mr. Gwynne.

"From California; I should have come home six months ago, but the cholera broke out, and I couldn't for the life of me help doctoring the poor fellows."

"You practised your profession?"

"I did for a short time."

Mr. Rolands thought if the stranger was a doctor, he ought to know better than squeeze

the blood from a man's hand, leaving the fingers numbed one on the other.

"At San Francisco?"

"Yes, on my way home, until I got the sickness myself: I thought it was all up with me then; but I recovered and came back, you see."

"Well, you must tell us your adventures. But eat a good supper first."

So Philip fell to, and enjoyed himself amazingly.

"I suppose you never practised at home?" asked Mr. Rolands.

"Yes, I did for some years."

"Didn't find it answer, sir?"

"Yes, well enough as far as that goes."

"Hem."

"You think he's not a good doctor," cried Mary indignantly; "I know you do, because you said 'hem' in that way: but he is; he is as good a doctor as you are a good lawyer; isn't he, Maud?"

They all laughed at Mary's vehemence, who now hung her head and blushed scarlet.

"You don't need an advocate at any rate," remarked the lawyer to Philip.

"Oh, she's to be my wife one day, that's why she's so warm in my defence."

"No," said Mary pertly, "I am not. You

know very well you are going to marry your cousin, the pretty lady; she was here ever so long; and I knew her because she was so like the picture you had of her."

"Yes," said Mr. Gwynne absently, "Miss Bryan stayed here, how many months, Maud?"

"Three or four—I don't exactly recollect," said Maud hurriedly.

"She's a bad correspondent; I don't think we heard from her more than once since she left, and that letter didn't come for two months afterwards," said Mr. Gwynne.—"By the by, Maud, have you never replied to it?"

"Our trouble came then—I could think of nothing. My brother died, Dr. Bryan," said Maud in a low voice, and with a very white face.

He turned the conversation immediately, and in compliance with Mr. Gwynne's request, told his adventures, Mary creeping to his side, and listening with wide open eyes.

He told how nearly three years ago he sailed in a magnificent new ship—the "Dauntless:" how off Newfoundland she got amongst icebergs, and went down. How the crew and passengers took to the boats in safety: how there were twenty of the crew, with the captain, they being the last to leave, in the boat he was in: how water failed; how one after another died, or

jumped overboard, raving; how the number dwindled to six; how they suffered; how they saw a sail on the eighth day, which passed and left them; how two more died that day; how the mate, a great, powerful man, tore the veins of his arm open with his teeth in a frenzy, and sucked till he died; how the remaining three had not strength to lift him overboard; how the sharks followed, playing about the boat; how one of the three was quite mad and swore he would catch a shark, offering himself for bait, and in a moment after, fell a headless corpse into the sea.

That was the last thing Philip remembered, till he found himself on the deck of a vessel which had picked him and the one other survivor up. By degrees he recovered, the other died; and when he landed at New York, having had enough of the sea, he went with a party of hunters to the prairies. They crossed the Rocky Mountains and away to the far west, escaping marvellously the wandering tribes of Indians; and after incredible hardships reached the great gold country, where they set to work, and got immense quantities of gold. The numbers of gold-diggers swelled daily, and murder, robbery, and fighting were of nightly occurrence; so after getting as much gold as he could well carry about him, he went down to San Francisco. Thence he

wrote home, and got replies, while there; and in due time, he arrived at Plymouth, to which place the ship he took passage in was bound.

"And the gold?" asked Mr. Rolands.

"Is in the kitchen: would you like to see it?"

Philip went out and returned with a carpet bag.

"Here it is; feel the weight," he said.

"Why, my dear sir, you will be worth a great deal of money: a very great deal if this is all gold!"

"It is, almost all. There may be a shirt or two besides."

"My dear sir, how can you venture to carry it about as luggage? astonishing really," said Mr. Rolands, weighing the bag with both hands.

"It's all right: quite safe; nobody 'll touch it."

"Safe or not, Bryan, you must take it to your room to-night: I won't have it left about," said Mr. Gwynne.

Poor Mr. Rolands clicked the lock of his door vainly, when he went upstairs. There was no catch, so wishing all Californian travellers at —— no, in a different house, he dragged the wash-stand against the door as a barricade.

CHAPTER XII.

A LIE.

"And the Recording Angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever."

"THEN you've not seen her since she went from here?"

"No, Dr. Bryan."

"What made you get so pale last night when she was spoken of?"

"Oh! you know my brother—died—then: that is about the time I last saw her."

"She came with you from that place?"

"Yes."

"Willingly?"

"Willingly."

"Was she false—worthless?—tell me. My mother enclosed a letter from her written while she was here; in consequence of that letter I came back. Was she deceiving my mother?"

"That was when I went to my brother," cried Maud, racked with pain.

"Miss Gwynne, if I thought she was deceiving me, I would never trouble myself about her any more. You are cruel to hide anything from me. If she is unworthy, tell me, and I will never see her again as I swore once."

"I know nothing."

God forgive her the lie.

"Poor Kate, I misjudged her, then. I behaved like a brute that night: I frightened her. After all, they were cousins."

"Oh, yes! they were cousins."

"I don't think you are well," he said, suddenly.

"No, I am not; I think we'd better go indoors," she said.

"Take my arm; you look fit to drop: are you subject to these attacks?"

"I am only a little sick; I shall be better directly: don't say anything before papa."

So they went in to breakfast, and Maud made the tea and sat out the meal with a face like death.

How miserable she felt! What could she do? Nothing. It was absolutely best to do nothing; to say nothing. What would be the consequence of divulging what she knew? Oh, madness! The results would be terrible. Only *they* and she knew it; no other living being had an idea of such a thing. Surely she was not called upon to divulge it? Surely this was no duty of hers?

Whether or no, she never would. None knew through her, none should ever know, the miserable secret: she would keep it, bear the burden of it, as Hugh would have done if he had lived. God forgive her for hiding the truth from Dr. Bryan!

* * * * *

"Very remarkable young man that," observed the lawyer, as they watched Philip up the mountain side the short way to Carrag. "Just look, my dear sir, he hired that man to carry his bag, and now in the steepest part of the mountain he has shouldered it himself: engaging a servant and doing the work, in fact."

"You forget that I can't see," said Mr. Gwynne.

"True; I beg your pardon, my dear sir."

Poor Mr. Rolands felt he had been wanting in attention; to make a diversion, he remarked,—

"Unhealthy weather, Miss Gwynne. Don't suit you at all, I should say: you look quite ill this morning."

"What's the matter, Maud?"

"Oh! nothing, papa, I assure you."

"This weather, my dear sir, must affect everybody," said Mr. Rolands, who saw he had again made a mistake. "Where the woods lie thick a fog hangs all day: you should see the country about Frorn! Blight on the oak universal."

"How are the woods at Woodford?"

"Bad enough: the great wood on the other side of the river worse. I never saw anything like it before."

"A fine autumn will clear the blight, and the late shoots may be healthy," remarked Mr. Gwynne, who was becoming hopeful.

"Hardly. I went up through the Forrestrange wood, from the wooden bridge the other day, and got covered with caterpillars as if I was a cabbage leaf. I had such an adventure there once, by-the-by."

"Indeed! what was it?"

"I was going up that way one night, and just after I crossed the wooden bridge:—you remember the old alder at the end, Miss Gwynne?—A figure flitted in the dark before me; there was no moon: it was very dark in fact, and I could scarcely distinguish it; but there it was, preceding me up the hill."

"Lately, Mr. Rolands?"

"No. Let me see—two years last December, I think; however, that is neither here nor there—it was in the winter, at any rate. Well, the figure went on before me, sometimes walking, sometimes running, sometimes stopping, but always keeping aloof, just a little in advance. Bless my soul, this will never do, I thought, so I called out 'Hulloa!' This made it go on all the faster; but on the

hill—you know how steep it is—I caught the figure; and to my surprise I found it was a lady. 'Hulloa! ma'am,' I said again. She made no reply, but presently sank on the grass; for her breath seemed quite gone. Bless my soul, ma'am, are you faint? I asked. She gave me no answer, but continued to breathe very hard. 'Palpitations?' I asked. She never said anything, and I had to kneel in the wet to hold her head up. You see, my dear sir, I am not used to ladies and their ways: all I could think of was, fanning; which I did with my hat, thereby catching cold in the head myself. It was very uncomfortable work, there in the damp; it had been blowing and hailing all day. At last when I saw she was coming to, I said, 'Madam, I will go on for assistance, if you will excuse me;' at which she suddenly sprang up, and was off like a shot: ladies are very unaccountable sometimes, my dear sir."

"Very—you were alarmed, Rolands."

"Startled certainly, my dear sir."

"Was it a ghost?" asked Mary.

"Not exactly, my dear."

"What did you do when she went?" pursued Mary, hoping for a continuation.

"I sat down."

"In the wet? How disagreeable it must have

been! Had you change of clothes at the house?"

"Not at the house, my dear, but in the village, where I went."

"What did you do then?"

"Well, my dear, I got Mrs. Jobbes to bring me some brandy and water, and went to bed."

"And that was all," sighed Mary, thinking the conclusion lame.

"By no means: I caught a dreadful cold, and suffered from lumbago and rheumatism for weeks."

"What's lumbago?" asked Mary.

"A pain in the back, my dear. I was unable to attend to business for many days; but that didn't so much signify, for Mr. Forrester went from home that evening, by the night train. I was not half right when he returned, either."

"And did no one find out who the lady was?"

"No, my dear. Bless my soul, Miss Gwynne is faint! this weather is dreadfully unhealthy."

CHAPTER XIII.

BLIGHT ON THE EARLY SHOOTS.

"That we should with joy, revel, pleasure, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts."

Mr. Rolands was right, the weather was most unhealthy; and Stephen Forrester walked backwards and forwards on the terrace, anathematizing it.

"Confound this weather, it makes a fellow wish to go to the devil before his time," he muttered.

The haze which veiled the sky and distance at the seaside, hung over the woodland districts in thick fog, breathing pestilence and death. The evening is closing gloomily; heavy with fog: the woods are capped over, and have been hidden for days, and the great trees which stand alone, are grim in outline, for a blight is on all: green caterpillars hang in myriads from each tree, and although it is summer, the oak woods are almost leafless, or at best the leaves are jagged and eaten, and the shoots black and withered.

"Talk of locusts! these beastly things are just as bad." Stephen had left the terrace and was lounging down towards the river, the caterpillars swaying against his face, and dropping on him! "Faugh! disgusting!" He turned back. "I must have a pull at the brandy, or deuce knows what will happen to me: a return ticket to the devil would be about as good as anything." He entered the dining-room by the window, where the dessert was still on the table, and discarding the various wines, poured out a glass of brandy, which he drank off, and then filled a flask, which he put into his pocket, and went out again. The stimulus had not the effect of enlivening him. "Confound it, this fog hangs like a pall," he said, throwing himself on the seat under the cedar. Blanche came out from the house.

"Stephen, it is not right to sit out in this tainted fog, and drinking brandy too! You are sure to kill yourself."

"Then I shan't be at the trouble of cutting my throat."

"Don't speak so recklessly: you shock me."

He whistled.

"I suppose the brandy makes you reckless."

"Come, Blanche, don't be cross; upon my honour I'm not drunk: we may as well be friends."

"Then come in, Stephen; you are going the very way to catch the fever."

A drizzling rain began to fall; a moaning sound hurried over the woods, and a low wail of the wind passed through the branches of the cedar above their heads.

"Come in; it is rash to stay out: the rain is beating on us," said Blanche.

"How's the child, Blanche?" asked Stephen, following her indoors.

"Just the same. Martha the laundry maid is ill to-night."

Stephen whistled again.

"Don't trifle! It is quite dreadful, when there is pestilence in the very air we breathe: I believe we are plague-stricken here."

"If you think that, you had better go after my wife."

"Fly, and leave the child?" she asked, scornfully.

"You are so fond of it, arn't you, Blanche?" retorted he, mockingly.

She turned away without vouchsafing a reply. He whistled again; Blanche went into her room, and he upstairs to the nursery, where the child in her crib lay flushed, parched, and restless. There was no one else in the nursery: it was deserted. He rang the bell furiously, until the

wire broke. Neither the nurse nor her satellite, the nursery maid, answered the summons, but Jack: old Jack, the only one of the old squire's servants, except the fat cook, now remaining at Forrestrange; for they were too homely a set to suit young Mrs. Forrester's notions, and had been replaced one after the other.

"Where are the women?" asked Stephen, angrily.

"They be so frightened, please, sir."

"Damn them! fetch them, instantly—instantly, do you hear?"

"Oh, sir, 'tis no mortal use! they're in the hall, all for going away!"

"Going away? what do you mean?"

"Oh, sir, since Martha laundry has been took, them others say they're afeard for themselves. Oh, sir, them women arn't like them as served in old times here."

Blanche, hearing Stephen's voice in loud anger, now came.

"Surely, you are mistaken, Jack," she said.

"No, indeed, 'm! The fright took 'em all at teatime: me and cook say all we can, but they stop us by saying back, their lives is as valible to them, as missis's to missis."

Blanche went into the library, and summoned the housekeeper.

"Quain, what is this? There was no one in the nursery."

"Well, mem, truth is truth, the poor things is penic struck. You see, mem, they've nothing but their health to depend on, and——"

"You mean they wish to go?"

"Well, mem, for the present: a new case to-day, you see, mem."

"Do you wish to go too?"

Blanche was intensely angry. Want of courage was no failing of hers: she was a true Forrester on that point.

"Well, mem, indeed, mem, I confess I feel alarmed; but I hope I have not displeased by saying so? I don't wish to leave permanently."

And so before night closed in, the great house of Forrestrange was almost deserted. The panic increased: down in the village there were no nurses for love or money: at least not half enough for the sick and the dying. Rich and poor were attacked, as if an eastern plague had been breathed over the neighbourhood. The blight and the fog, now drizzling in warm rain, continued; the hay was sodden and black, fit only for the dunghills: it was a time that never will be forgotten at Forrestrange and the country round.

Blanche the following day became oppressed with languor; although she drank great quantities

of water during the day, her thirst increased, and she declared there was a bad taste in the water. Then followed a heavy night. When she woke in the morning, she was unable to get up, and complained moaningly. Dr. Moore paid her a visit, and told Stephen the fever had attacked her too.

During the days that succeeded, Stephen did nothing but stroll listlessly about the house, going up to Blanche sometimes, and sometimes to the nursery. No one would have taken this shaky, listless man to be the Stephen of four years ago. "Such a wreck," thought Dr. Moore. "Poor fellow!"

Sick people have strange fancies; and to-day Blanche asks perpetually why Maud doesn't come into the room. She knows Maud is in the house, she says: why does she keep away? Is she angry?

Blanche moans this to Stephen.

"And why does he prevent her coming up? No one can nurse like Maud: it is very unkind of him to hide her in that way."

A sudden idea strikes him: a sudden revival comes over him; he rushes downstairs, and without more ado—without one moment's reflection, with no thought of the selfishness of the act—he hastily writes with his shaky hand

a scrawly letter, entreating Maud to come to Blanche; entreating her for the love of heaven to set off without any delay.

The letter goes to Maud; but no reply comes the day he expects. Blanche every five minutes asks where Maud is; but there is no arrival at Forrestrange, nor any letter. As the evening of the desolate day comes on, Stephen applies himself to brandy, wanders out in the gloaming, and with a loose, shambling gait goes down towards the river.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLIGHT SPREADS.

"For if that thou
Throw in a water now a stone,
Well wotest thou it will make anon,
A little roundel as a circle,
* * * *
That circle cause another wheel,
And that the third, and so forth, brother."

Two days before the scene described in the last chapter, Mrs. Bryan, according to custom at Connomore, had left the parlour when the clock struck eight, to go into the kitchen and talk over the work to be done with Alick her head man. Winter or summer, she always goes at this hour of the evening, and during the half-hour she remains in the kitchen, discusses with Alick the ploughing, the draining, the sowing, the reaping, the horses, the oxen, the cows, calves, sheep and pigs, in short, everything pertaining to the farm.

To-night, a glowing peat fire reddens the chimney corner, where near the wide hearth an arm chair with a leather cushion is placed in readiness for the mistress. Such a nice old kitchen! bright with rows of shining coppers and polished pewter plates ranged on the black oak dresser.

Quite a sight, too, is the year's store of bacon, hanging from the rafters. In the kitchen now, there are Molly, and Norah, and old Rose, Martin, Pat and Alick, and old Larry, who has his supper brought to him on the settle. The old man does little else these days but sit there; for the weather in Ireland is just as bad as it is in England—indeed worse: soaking, drenching rain, quite unfit for old people to stir out, although it is midsummer.

There are three or four dogs stretched before the fire, and a last spring lamb is poking its nose into old Larry's hand; two cats, three kittens, a fat puppy, and in a basket an invalid turkey, also enjoy the warmth of the kitchen.

Molly has just turned over the pot of mealy, broken-skinned potatoes on the table, and Norah is filling the wooden noggins with milk. Pat pinches her as she passes him.

"Hould yer fingers at home, will ye?" says Norah, who has quarrelled with Pat regularly every evening for the last six months.

"Whisht to yer clack, Norah!" exclaims Molly, setting the pot down; "here's the mishtress coming!"

"Lord save us! an' she'll be asking after Bess," cried Alick, *sotto voce:* "an' I thought for sartin to see after the baste's leg, bad luck to her; but I'll see about it the morrow."

"Och!" whispers Pat; "an' there's the pigs gruntin' at the door! an' mishtress gave me the nails to mend the bit yard-gate to keep the craythurs out; an' I meant for sartin to see about it the afternoon, but forgot, bad luck to me memory."

"Well, Alick, it looks as like rain as ever," says Mrs. Bryan, entering the kitchen.

"Thrue for ye, ma'am, dear; och hone!"

"But I don't think the crops are damaged yet; I was out just now, and surprised to see the hay so little beaten down. The wheat and barley are no worse, nor the oats: it may clear before the grain gets heavy, after all."

"Thrue for ye, me lady; thank the Lord it isn't harvest yet: all manner o' joy to it."

"Pat, I gave ye nails to mend the yard-gate: ye never did it; and I had to call Norah from her work to drive the pigs from the door just now. There they are again."

"Och, yes, mishtress, dear! sure it's goodbye, they've come to say; niver again will ye hear

their swate voices at the house. I'll step out an' hurrish the craythurs off directly I've had me male, praise the Lord for it."

"And mend the gate: do it before ye go to bed; there will be light enough."

"Thrue for ye, m'am, dear."

"How is the mare's leg, Alick?"

"Faith! I forgot the baste intirely."

"Just like ye!" exclaimed the mistress, angrily; "it's no manner of use to tell any of ye anything, unless I see to it meself as well. Alick, a grown man of forty as ye are, ye ought to be ashamed of yerself! Ye're no more to be trusted than a colleen bawn."

"Och! the leg is all right intirely."

"Martin," interrupted the mistress, "since Alick can't attend the mare, I'll just step up the field after supper and see to the poor baste."

"Och, ma'am, dear," cried Alick, "sure ye're not for puttin' Martin before his betthers! An' I serving you faithful an' honest since I could step, belike? an' wad lose every drhap o' me blood before harm should come to ye! Och, mishtress! sure 'tis fracshus ye are this blessed night."

Alick rose to leave the table.

"Finish yere supper, and then go and do what ye ought to have done this morning: Molly can't be keeping supper about all night."

"Faith, mishtress, dear, that's sinse anyhow. Bedad sorra a thing I'll forget in a hurry agin, let alone Bess's leg, I'm thinking."

"Well, Larry," said the mistress, turning to the old man, "and how are ye finding yourself this evening?"

"Is it me? Och, thin, 'tis the mullygrubs as gives me the trouble," replied Larry, rubbing his stomach.

Mrs. Bryan smiled.

"It's the drop whisky ye're after I reckon, Larry."

"An' sure 'tis the drhap whisky that agrees best with me wake stomach, o' all yer blessed medicines. Long life to ye, ma'am, dear!"

"Well, Larry, ye shall have the hot glass when the girls are finished with their supper."

"Thankye, mishtress. Sure it will stop the mullygrubs an' no mistake; och hone!"

"Whisht!" cried old Rose, from the supper table. "Whisht! hould yer groanin', Larry: I heard the front door scraach. Norah, I tould ye to graze it. Wha' could ha' come in?"

The dogs pricked their ears; the fat puppy tried to balance himself, and made an attempt at an embryo bark; the boys and girls listened, and looked at each other.

"Mother!" shouted a voice.

"The holy saints defind us!" cried Rose, turning white in the face.

"The banshee! The banshee of Bryan Mount!" cried the girls, aghast.

"It's me boy! it's Philip! It's he himself come home! Me boy! me boy!" exclaimed the old lady, rising and hastening away, trembling in every limb.

"Och, mishtress, dear! sthop wid us for God's sake; don't go: maybe 'tis only a wraith! och! och!"

"Philip!" cried his mother.

"And here you all are!" exclaimed he, striding to meet her.

"Me boy!"

"Och, by Saint Patrick, 'tis the boy!" cried old Larry, tottering up. "Hurroo! hurroo! ould Ireland for iver! Och, me heart's as big as me body! och! och!"

"An' is it you yoursel, Mister Philip, tell us?" shouted Alick.

"Faith an' it is," said Pat.

"No banshee, but his own sel!" cried Molly.

"The Lord be praised!" said old Rose.

"Ay, ay," cried Philip, releasing his mother, and shaking hands all round.

"An' it's a power o' happiness to each sowl

of us to see ye look so brave an' beautiful this blessed evenin', Mr. Philip," said Rose, again.

"Sit ye down, Mr. Philip, bless ye!" said old Larry. "An', mishtress, dear, sure it's the whishky as 'ud keep the joy in our hearts, istid o' rinning out o' our eyes in thish way."

The mistress was crying; so was Rose, so was old Larry. Philip looked towards the door; he listened for a footstep: evidently he expected *another* to greet him. But he asked no question, and presently left the kitchen with Mrs. Bryan for supper in the parlour, where he was waited on by everybody.

His mother kept him in close conversation over the meal, asking all sorts of questions respecting his travels. He told her of the gold he had brought, and said he thought he had had enough of wandering, and would stay at home for the future; and when Rose carried out the supper, together with a large bowl of whisky punch, and they were alone, he suddenly asked:

"Mother, where is Kate?"

"Me boy, don't take it to heart; she's not here."

"Where is she then?"

"Look ye here, me boy," said the old lady, dropping her voice; "it's no manner of use for

you to hanker after her. I had rather ye were drowned in the salt sea, than ——"

"Mother!"

"I would, me boy; though I'm your mother, and I believe you are dearer to me than my own soul."

"But, mother, I've got so much gold. I thought of settling comfortably: I thought to find her with you, and ——"

"Me boy, can you bear to hear a great wonderment?"

"Yes, anything; only make haste, mother."

"Well, in the first place, she's a professed Catholic now."

"Kate, a Catholic!"

"Yes, me boy."

"Why? Since when? What for? In heaven's name tell me."

"Since—since: but it will be sharp news for ye, Philip, if ye are tender about her."

"Nonsense: go on, mother."

Not a muscle moved in Philip's face; he folded his arms across his broad chest and waited, while his mother hesitated, seemingly afraid of communicating unpleasant news.

"Well, mother?"

He looked her full in the face, and his bronzed cheek betrayed no anxiety whatever.

"She was a jilting flirt, me boy."

These were the most opprobrious terms Mrs. Bryan could think of.

"Tut, never mind that, mother: where is she? And what made her change her creed?"

"She was worthless and fickle, Philip:" the mother fixed her clear eyes on her son: "too fickle to be true to you, or any man."

"Is she married, mother?"

"She is, Philip."

Not one remark did he make; but he stood up, his arms still crossed.

"And, me boy, it's the best piece of luck for ye in the world, if ye'd only think so."

Mrs. Bryan paused, expecting him to speak; but he never said a word.

"Well, ye'll come to think so in time, if ye don't this minute: come, me boy, ye've not tasted the punch ye brewed your own self," said Mrs. Bryan, rising, glass in hand, and giving it to him. "I'll take a sip after ye, if ye drink first."

"Tell me whom she married, mother?" asked Philip, after the lapse of some minutes.

"Well ye may ask; no sensible man would have taken her: nobody but an old dotard, who wanted a doll to play with."

"Has she married the jeweller who made his

fortune in Dublin, and bought Bryan Mount, mother?"

"Yes, me boy; and she passes here to mass in her grand carriage, all finery and jewels, by the side of her withered old husband. Philip, ye've had a lucky escape, and no mistake."

"Let us go to the kitchen, mother, while I smoke my pipe," interrupted he; "it's such a cheerful place of an evening."

In the night Mrs. Bryan was wakeful: she mistrusted Philip's apparent indifference on hearing of Kate's marriage. Well she might: he was walking up and down his room half mad. In the early morning, haggard and ill, he lay down. Mrs. Bryan went there.

"Did I hear ye pacing in the night, Philip?" she asked.

"Perhaps you might; I have got into the habit on shipboard."

"Me boy, ye are not well: I know by yere face ye're not."

"Don't worry, mother."

"But I know ye're not: maybe ye've taken Kate's behaviour too much to heart."

"Do leave me."

"Me boy, I want ye to come to see she was not worth caring for: she was an illusion altogether. Never would ye have cared for her, if ye

took into consideration what she was made of. Indeed, me boy, ye ought not to vex that she is married.

"Mother," he cried, starting up in bed, "you didn't encourage her to marry another, surely."

"Not quite that, me boy; but I didn't seek to stop her."

"Then, mother, I curse the day you gave me birth!"

He looked furious, and his eyes flashed: passion, anger, that had been quelled until it almost maddened him, was now finding vent.

"Me boy," said Mrs. Bryan, mildly, "before that curse is registered, call it back."

"No; I curse the day I was born! Take that for your comfort."

"Me boy," interrupted Mrs. Bryan, laying her hand on his shoulder, "you would recall that were you to know all."

"All!" he savagely interrupted: "isn't it enough for me to know that she is gone—my pretty, loving Kate? Isn't it enough for me to know that she came back here after the quarrel we had in England, and forgave me, as her letter showed; and that you put between us ——"

"Hush, Philip! when I sent you that letter I didn't know all."

"Unfeeling, cruel woman!" muttered Philip, shaking her hand off and looking hatred.

"Hush, Philip! I thought of keeping something a secret that should go to the grave with me; but if your feelings and judgment go wrong through want of knowledge, I had better enlighten you. I need not ask you to keep it a secret; you will, on your own account, because she was of your name, a Bryan."

"What has that to do with it? Tell me this secret: precious secret, I'll be bound."

"Me boy, when she came home," went on Mrs. Bryan, speaking very softly, "she was ill and desponding, and was for ever saying she would 'go to the priest;' that 'confession was such comfort:' indeed she would go for a nun. I was angry enough at her nonsensical talk, but seeing her look so ill, I couldn't help treating her gently and taking all she said kindly. One evening we were in the garden, a fine spring evening it was, and the lilacs were smelling sweet after a shower of rain, and she said, 'They remind me of Forrestrange;' and then she began to cry, and presently spoke of confession, again. I said, 'Kate, does something trouble you, more than I know? Sure wouldn't it be better for ye to open yere mind to *me*, than all the priests in Ireland, avourneen? for am not I yere aunt, and

own mother to Philip, who has the same blood as yourself in his veins?' Then she cried more; so much, that I brought her into the house from the garden; and when she sat down in the parlour, and I shut the door, she told me all, me boy."

"The precious secret, I suppose," he said scornfully. "Well, tell me what it was, that you should make such a fuss?"

Mrs. Bryan put her mouth to his ear, and whispered. The blood rushed to his face, and then suddenly ebbed, leaving it ghastly. For a moment he looked like a dying man.

"Yes, Philip, ye may well look scared," went on Mrs. Bryan: "it nearly broke me heart at the time. But no one knows of the shame; and she told me the child was dead—dying when the nurse took it. Come, me boy, bear up: it's past now, and in the eyes of the world she's an honest woman. I sorrow to have given you this pain; but I saw it was needful you should know."

"Forgive me, mother, for my wicked curses. Mother, leave me."

It was Philip who said this; but the voice was very unlike Philip's.

She went.

"Yes," he said, "my mother is right; it was

better I should know." And he swore a huge oath.

His deep life-long love ebbed from his heart, as if an artery had been opened and it gushed away with the blood; but, instead, there came up so fierce a hate, that, like a fevered wretch thirsting for drink, he thirsted for revenge: revenge on Stephen Forrester!

That very day he set off for England, telling his mother he was going on business, and she need not expect him back for three days: he might come, he said, the evening of the third day.

CHAPTER XV.

SQUARING A RECKONING.

"I tell thee I am mad."

This miserable evening, Maud was journeying to Forrestrange. The whole landscape was obscured by the drizzling, misty rain; and it was already growing quite dusk. Notwithstanding her father's, Mrs. Pritchard's, every one's entreaties to the contrary, she had left home to come to nurse Blanche.

From the moment Stephen's note had been read, an acute sense that she "must go," came upon her. These instincts are very wonderful: can anyone tell us whence they proceed? Arguments, commands, were of no avail; Maud said she *would* go: oh, no, she did not fear infection in the least; she must go: something impelled her on. And so, to the consternation of all at Hafod, she went: her only dread being that she should be too late to see Blanche alive.

For when she read of her illness, gathering from Stephen's note its dangerous tendency, Maud's memory rushed over late years, scarcely heeding them; and rested on the earlier time when Blanche was her first and best friend. Everything else was forgotten: the unkindness, the irremediable wrong; and now she only thought of Blanche laid down with sickness; delirious, perhaps dying, and asking incessantly (as Stephen mentioned), "Why Maud did not come?"

The fog hangs thick and low to-night, clinging to the woods, when Maud arrives at the station: it is a wretched, dismal evening. The eaves drip, the flags are wet, and the road is muddy and sloppy; and worse than all, there is neither cab nor carriage to be found to take her on: nothing but an old gig, which happens to be stowed away under a shed, but which the proprietor assures her "is quite safe, though a little rattlesome." While this is getting ready, Maud, whose sole desire is to reach Forrestrange as quickly as possible, walks on, desiring the man to follow as speedily as he can.

Meanwhile she walks rapidly, and now nears a path which leads to the Woodford meadows. If she takes this, the distance will be considerably shortened; but then she must walk the whole way; for the gig will have to go round by the

road, through the village. She looks back and listens: perhaps the gig will not come for another half-hour, and in that time she would be at the house. There is nothing to be afraid of, nothing; she will walk on.

Getting over the stile, she takes the meadow path, and by and by sees a man before her. She lingers rather, for she has no wish to overtake him. The man has an odd, irregular gait, and his pace is uncertain: sometimes he goes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes almost on a run; now he stops short. Maud stops too, for she has no wish to fall in with him.

The night, though thick, is not dark: a dull light penetrates the fog, for the hidden moon is at the full. The wooden bridge is in sight and the man crosses it. A gust of wind shakes great drops from the branches of the old alder-tree, as Maud waits under its shadow.

The man was barely over the bridge, when another man, striding right up, confronted him.

"Stop. If you are Stephen Forrester, I've a word to say to you."

"Stephen Forrester; of course I'm Stephen Forrester—what then?"

The two were on the brink of the river, above the still, dark pool.

"I've a reckoning to square with you."

The men were face to face, and could see each other's eyes.

"I know nothing of you; you are a stranger to me."

"I am Philip Bryan, Kate's cousin: there; is that enough?"

"Well?" returned Stephen nonchalantly.

"Well!" retorted the other, his eyes flashing, and his breath coming like the pant of a fierce animal.

"I say again: well?"

Philip stood motionless; as still as a tiger crouching for a spring.

"I say again, well? What would you have? Here I am," pursued Stephen carelessly.

Still Philip did not move; but his teeth were set, and his right hand clenched.

"Oh, I say, I don't see the fun of this: if you choose to amuse yourself by standing here, you may; as for me I am going;" and Stephen made a step forward.

"Villain! no!" burst out Philip, hitting straight out and striking his enemy a dreadful blow in the face. Stephen reeled back over the edge of the steep bank, and fell helplessly into the deep pool.

With a loud shriek, Maud darted across the bridge: she had no idea who the men were, for

she had been too far off to distinguish the voices; but the plash in the water caused her instinctively to cry out, and to run forward.

"What is it? Who is it?" she cried.

Stephen struggled heavily: he was partially stunned, and made no efforts to swim; only labouring to keep himself above water.

Maud rushed to the man standing on the bank.

"Are you a man? and can you stand and see another drowning? Shame on you! Help, help!" she cried.

He never stirred.

"Hold me by the dress; I will go down if you cannot," she cried, tearing off her shawl and bonnet.

She was forcibly held back, and then discovered it was Philip! But with such a countenance! it curdled her very blood.

"The monster—the villain!—let him die."

"Stephen; is it Stephen?"

"Yes—ha! ha!" laughed Philip.

"Oh, my God!"

She tried to free herself, but Philip held her fast.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed again.

The sinking man was making violent plunges: two or three strokes would have taken him to

where the bank shelved, and where he could have landed easily; but he seemed powerless.

"Swim, Stephen: swim as you used to do: swim!" Her voice was frenzied.

"He shall die," muttered Philip: "see, he sinks."

His struggles were getting weaker; and the thick, heavy mist came creeping up over the dark water, hiding him from view.

"Mercy, Philip, mercy!" she implored, and sank on her knees before him.

"Mercy? did *he* show mercy? No, on my soul!"

"Save him! Oh, my God!"

She embraced his knees; she tried to force him to move. "Oh," she gasped, "give him time—his soul—by your own hopes of heaven!"

"Heaven? what care I for heaven? He has given me hell tortures: it is his turn now."

Fainter and fainter were the struggles. Thickly and stealthily came the mist; and now he was quite hidden. Like lightning an acute remembrance struck Maud. Starting to her feet, she cried,—

"Philip, long years ago you swore that, ask what I would, you would grant it."

He laughed bitterly.

"A murderer need not scruple to keep promises to women."

"Philip, Philip, save him!" Then gathering her energies for one more pleading: "Save him," she cried, "for I have suffered as you have: as you loved Kate, I loved Stephen!"

Instantly he glanced down and scanned her face: even in that dim light its anguished look was visible. The truth smote Philip, and quick as thought he loosed her, and sprang into the river. Seizing Stephen, he brought him ashore, dragged him up the bank, laid him on the grass, and burst into a paroxysm of grief.

Strange nature, incomprehensible in its workings! Here is this man, who, for two days has been remorselessly bent on vengeance—who, during every moment of that time, has, like any bloodthirsty beast, panted for his prey; who, in his hate and fury, swore that either he or his enemy should perish—here is this man now using all his power to sustain the life he came to destroy.

Stephen began to breathe in a loud stertorous manner.

"He must have other assistance," said Philip, rising.

And Maud was left alone, to watch over the unconscious man, while Philip, at full speed, went for help.

* * * * *

Two evenings later at Connomore farm, Rose

came into the kitchen where old Larry happened to be alone, and said,—

"Och hone, Larry, 'tis bad news sure the post brought this day! Mr. Philip the darlint is no comin' back; an the mishtress is sore troubled. She reckoned so sure on seein' him this night, and havin' him livin' here in pace and happiness for many's the day. Och hone, Larry! och hone!"

"Och, Rose, and is that thrue?"

"Thrue as gospil! The mishtress read his little letter out, and he's off to the grate sea again. She's sore grieved, and is not for comin' to spake with the boys and girls to-night."

"An' why doesn't Mr. Philip come, Rose, agra?"

"It's not in the letter, Larry."

"Then I know," replied Larry, striking his stick in the ground. "Rose, did ye mark how he was lookin' an lookin' for more than he saw the night he came?"

"Thrue for ye, Larry."

"That's it, Rose, depind. Bad luck to her for botherin' the boy's brains."

"Ay, bad luck, Larry! the good-for-nothin craythur: but for all her triflin' and playin' false, an' jiltin' him, she'll get pace an' indulgence now; for she's got intirely devout since there's bin a chaplin in the house," said Rose, in a profound whisper.

"That's thrue, Rose," replied Larry; who, like Rose, was a Protestant, having been brought up by Mrs. Bryan's father a "rank heretic:" "an' it's jist a thrifle o' confesshun an' absolution that 'l be at Bryan Mount. Begorra, the ould man must be clane daft to keep a rivrince like that."

"Whisht, Larry, if yere tongue says words like that, it's kilt and murthered yere bones will be, for thruth."

"Well, Rose, that's thrue anyhow; an' so in case me thoughts get too strong an' rin off me tongue this night when the boys an' girls come in, sorra a bit longer will I sthop down the stairs, an' so good-night to ye, Rose," and Larry tottered off to bed.

Rose went to the parlour.

"It's the sickness of disappointment that's come over me, Rose. I thought for certain he would be back this evening: I know it's the disappointment, for I reckoned on seeing him. I'm heavy, Rose."

Before the sentence was finished, Mrs. Bryan fell forward. She was stricken with paralysis.

CHAPTER XVI.

FAIR WEATHER.

"They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;
A dreary scene now flows between,
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
Shall wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been."

FORRESTRANGE is a sad house: Mrs. Forrester is away, and the child was carried a week ago to lie by her grandfather's side in the old family vault.

Maud, directly she arrived, had written to the mother to say the child was worse—much worse; and an answer full of complaints had come back, to the purport that this communication had made her (Mrs. Forrester) so ill, that she was confined to her bed; and that it was most unkind of Stephen not to go and see her. To which Maud replied that Stephen was very ill—but not of the fever—and that it would be well if

Mrs. Forrester could conquer her fears, and come to nurse him.

Before an answer came to this again, little Florence died. One more letter Maud wrote, and then left the notes that showered in unanswered; indeed, unread on the library table, where Jack placed them: she had no time to write, her attention was completely taken up by the sick; for she attended to the maids, as well as to Blanche and Stephen.

At last signs of amendment appear. Blanche has slept for several hours, and Maud, sitting at the bedside, dozing, starts at the whisper of her name. Blanche's eyes are fixed on her face, with a look of recognition.

"When did you come, Maud?" she asks.

"A long while since, dear Blanche."

"Why didn't they tell me? I wanted you so much: Florence only worried me."

"Tell me what has happened, Maud," asked Blanche, again, presently.

"You have been ill, Blanche; but you will get on bravely now: ah! here comes Dr. Moore: I hear his step. He will be so pleased to find you better."

The door opened; instead of the doctor, in walked Stephen, looking so old and so like his father as to startle Maud.

"I came to see you, Blanche," he said, seating

himself on the bedside. "I escaped when Jack was off guard."

"How long have you been here, Maud?" asked Blanche.

"Three weeks last Thursday."

"Ah! the day I was taken ill," said Stephen. "I fell off that rickety bridge: you weren't come then; I remember I had given up expecting you: indeed, that is the last thing I do remember."

"I think you'd better go now; Blanche will be tired," said Maud softly.

"Yes; the first person I knew after my illness was you, Maud. For some time I fancied it was a dream, you bathing my forehead, and dressing some horrid blister." He went.

Half an hour afterwards the doctor came. "Convalescent," he pronounced them all. "Fever gone; only to keep up strength now: tonics."

Maud's more active nursing now began. The weary days and nights so long and heavy were gone; and she had to move about perpetually, to alter this pillow or that, to reach this thing or that, to pour out some pleasant drink or strengthening medicine, to bring fancied food, or a delicately prepared morsel to tempt the weak appetite.

With the beginning of August came strong westerly winds, and flying clouds streamed rapid

showers over the country. This sharp rain quickly washed off the caterpillars from the oak woods; and already strong young shoots were sprouting. The harvest was very late; in many places the hay was quite spoiled, in others damaged, but on high land still uncut.

This fresh clear rain is a blessing: the swift floods clear the drains and stagnant ditches, and the river rolls on in a wide swift stream, carrying away all impurities; if the rain will only cease, and the sun shine out, there will be a good corn harvest after all.

At last a deep blue sky is visible; the air is fresh and genial, the wind high still, but the grey low swept clouds have vanished, and the golden corn and long grass wave like a sea in the strong westerly breeze. Everywhere the uncarried hay is being scattered, and the stacked, opened at the top for the drying wind to blow in.

At the sea-side, day passes away in gorgeous red, but here inland the sunset fire burns paler, and the new moon, a fine silver crescent, with the points upwards, shines in unclouded azure; the farmers' spirits rise, and they declare there is settled fine weather, for they could easy hang a hat on each horn of the moon.

Blanche sat up to-day for some time, and to-

morrow she may change her room; Stephen has been out two or three times, and the maids are gone home to get strong.

Stephen took little Florence's death a good deal to heart, as also did Blanche for a little while; but now they both think that death was a happy release to the poor little suffering child.

Hitherto the weather had afforded no temptation to Maud to go out of doors, but this evening, just after sunset, when Blanche is comfortably in bed again, she says,

"Blanche, I think I will take a turn before dark, it looks so pleasant out of doors."

"Twilight is very cheerless to an invalid," observes Blanche.

Stephen had just entered the room.

"Don't be so selfish, Blanche," he said; "Maud has been with you all day, she ought to go out now."

"I wish she had gone before; I want her to read to me now: this is the most dismal time of the day, Stephen."

"I shouldn't be away ten minutes, Blanche," said Maud.

"But that ten minutes would be an age to me. Of course, you, Maud, who are well and strong, cannot understand the want of some one, at this cheerless time."

"Nonsense," broke in Stephen; "Maud must go: come, Maud, I will go too."

"If you will remain with Blanche while I am away, I will go, not otherwise: do, please," said Maud.

Of course he was obliged to comply, at least for the present, and Maud went.

There is something in a clear, quiet evening, especially if it comes after dark days of rain and gloom, which seems to administer a healing sensation, a balm that soothes the mind and calms the senses. This influence Maud felt now: she had been yearning for an hour to herself, and she was thankful to be alone.

"I am a sinful fool," she thought, after being occupied for some time in dispassionate reflection. "The old feeling would come back; I knew it would, although all has been over so long ago."

She stood still and looked over the dusky landscape, away to where the rich woodlands of her old home loomed dark against the evening sky.

"And we shall come there again; and he and I must meet constantly, of necessity be friends: neighbours, as in the years when I was a girl. Well, there is strength to be found for all trials: yes; hitherto I fear I trusted too much in myself, that is why I have been overtaken again. I know what Hugh would tell me to do."

She looked up. A few pale stars shone tremulous in the darkening blue above. Deep evening silence had fallen, and there was no sound but the river below, flowing ever onward to the sea.

"Oh, Hugh," she murmured; "I hear, and I remember your words: 'Watch, look into your hearts, eradicate lurking evil, be resolute, and refuse to give way to evil thoughts; thus the tempter will be baffled:' you have often said this to me, Hugh, and I will obey your counsel—I will."

Soundless as the life-giving evening air, a solemn prayer aspired from her heart. The glowing hues of the sunset were fast fading into gray; the wood, the plain, and the hill-side becoming obscured; but in the cloudless sky, the crescent moon and lustrous stars vanquished darkness.

Presently Maud continued her walk; when she returned from the end of the terrace, Stephen met her.

"I've brought you a shawl," he said: "let me put it on for you," and he placed it on her shoulders. "How pleasant it is out here!"

"Yes—but I am going in now," said Maud.

"Blanche is asleep; you needn't hurry."

"I have been out long enough: I prefer going in."

"Contradictory and obstinate as usual: always the same, Maud."

"Thank you." Had there been daylight, Maud's face would have been seen to flush hot.

"But you are—you always were: my memory is good on some points, Maud."

"Your neighbours' failings, I see—oh, dismiss the subject!"

She walked towards the house, he accompanying her.

"Maud, I have been thinking over your suggestion that I should join my wife at Brighton," he said.

"You are going to-morrow?" she asked.

"No, I have changed my mind; I don't see much use in leaving here till Blanche is able to go with me."

"Leave Blanche to me; there is not the slightest necessity for your remaining on that account."

"But it is so unkind to leave her."

"Not at all: I will take care she doesn't suffer in consequence."

"But, Maud, I am getting so well myself: better in fact than I've been for years; and I don't see why I should run any risk. This place agrees with me better than anywhere in the world, and—"

Maud quickened her pace; they were yet some distance from the entrance door, but near the gable.

"I will go up to Blanche's room through the side door," she said; "it will save my going round."

"Make good use of it for once then," he said; "I am going to have it closed up again."

"Why?"

"I hate it!"

"I remember Blanche telling me that poor godpapa closed it up too, because it made the house draughty."

"Yes, it does. He was right in everything!" Stephen gave a great sigh.

At the foot of the stone stairs she stopped and said,

"You will go to-morrow."

"Go? Why?"

She lifted her pure truthful eyes to his, and said,

"I think you ought, indeed!"

"Oh, hang 'ought'—hang everything: I'll stop at home."

She ran up the steps. "Good night," she said, vanishing.

For an hour or more he sat there alone. Then he went in and walked straight to Blanche's room.

"Blanche is asleep still," said Maud: "by staying here you will awake her."

"Oh, well," he said, in a low voice; "give her my love when she wakes: I won't disturb her; and say good-bye from me. I have reconsidered the matter, and think I may as well be off to Brighton to-morrow: I dare say my wife will be expecting me; and after poor little Floy, and all. Yes, Maud, I agree with you; I ought to go as soon as I can: good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said. "God guard you, Stephen."

They shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARVEST.

"Such things, however trivial, reach the heart."

In three weeks' time Blanche was sufficiently recovered to leave home: the doctor said she could bear the journey to Brighton, and that the change would be beneficial; so on one of the last days in August she set off to join Stephen and Florence.

Nothing would induce Maud to accompany her farther than the station, where Blanche went one way and Maud another.

Maud must go home; it was high time she should return: she couldn't think of remaining any longer away from her father, who she knew wanted her sadly; so she bade good-bye to Blanche.

But Maud did not go straight down to Wales: in her own mind she had arranged a little detour, and now she carried it into effect.

At a certain junction she got out of the train,

entered another on a different line, and travelled the remainder of the day down west.

It was a tranquil, glowing harvest day; the deep green masses of foliage rising stirless against the azure sky, fields golden with the ripened grain, and the white shirts of the reapers glanced amidst the standing corn, as they stooped to put in the sickle, or bind up the sheaves.

About Westcliffe, the cottage and farm households were out in the fields, gleaning; mothers and all the children who were big enough worked hard, whilst the little ones played, or took care of the baby under a shady tree.

In the rectory glebe—the great field adjoining the churchyard—the piled sheaves stand thick, for it has a wonderful crop this year; and this afternoon it is being harvested, the wains creaking under their loads, and all the village has turned out to help. After it is all carried, there will be a harvest home supper at the rectory.

To Westcliffe, Maud comes this fine August evening. She walks quickly down the village street, and as she passes the rectory, her heart almost dies within her. All looks just the same; the open windows, the grey smoke rising amongst the dark yew-trees at the back, the trim lawn, and deep evening shadows on the sunny grass. She passes the rectory-gate with its funereal

cypresses, and the tears dim her sight as she enters the churchyard. She goes on straight by the chancel window, seeing nothing until she comes to the plain stone cross on Hugh's grave. Weeping bitterly, and unable to repress loud sobs, she stumbles, and almost falls over some obstacle at her feet: it is a child fast asleep, with a torn pinafore full of daisy-heads and buttercups. But Maud only knows she is at Hugh's grave: she only thinks of the dead brother, and the vanished face; and the stilled voice comes back, oh, so piteously! Weep on, Maud! there is virtue in tears; for relief will follow.

* * * * *

From the near cornfield sounds of merriment and labour come; the sun is sinking, and the last load comes down the lane by the churchyard, leaving traces of its passage on the hedge-row elms, and heralded by sun-browned labourers, shouting "Harvest home!"

Maud's weeping presently is spent, and she reads inscribed on the headstone:—

"HUGH GWYNNE,
Rector of Westcliffe,
Died,
Aged 29 years,
In the year of our Lord ——

'Thy will be done.'"

Clasping her hands, she leans on the stone, and cries, "Even so, Father. Amen."

Hugh Gwynne! saintly Hugh Gwynne! simple is the inscription on the headstone at the grave, but the record of thy earthly warfare is written in the Book of Life!

Maud rises, and looks at the plump, curly-headed child, holding its pinafore tight in its sleep. She does not disturb it, but steps by; and when she leaves the churchyard, goes to Solomon Lobb's.

The monthly roses, creeping up the cottage wall, are still in bright bloom; the low sunlight making them glow with rare glory as Maud enters the bit of garden.

Maud sat down on the chair Mrs. Lobb brought from the row against the wall (which, although as bright as rubbing could make, was, nevertheless, dusted for the visitor), and answered the nurse's questions as well as she could; in return asking for Solomon, and other village folk. Meanwhile, her eyes wandered all round the kitchen, and her heart thrilled when she saw a child's hat on a peg.

"You notice the hat, Miss Gwynne? The boy is as fine a child as ever you can see: dear me!"

Mrs. Lobb attributed Maud's sudden change

of colour to the recollections which must necessarily crowd upon her mind.

"Ay, ay!" she went on; "you've no call to care about hearing nought about him."

"But I care very much," interrupted Maud, "and I want to see him too; where is he?"

"I saw him go to the churchyard a time gone; that's his pleasure, Miss Gwynne: he learned it when he used to go with Solomon to mind the grave with snowdrops, and most days he gathers a brat full of any sort o' flowers he can get; it's his play to put them on the 'good parson's bed,' as he calls the grave."

Mrs. Lobb's lip trembled, and Maud's emotion was so great that she suddenly left the house, saying, "I want to go to the churchyard."

The child had awoke, and was shaking out the flower-heads from its ragged pinafore when Maud went back, prattling to himself and scattering the flowers; his back was towards her, and she could only see that he was a stout, curly-head, little fellow. But when he turned presently, and seeing Maud, stared with wide open great blue eyes, she was struck by a quick sharp pain. Talk of resemblance! Never was there a stronger likeness between father and child than this: in her life she never saw anything more distinctly: he was so like!

"Little boy, come to me," she said.

The child crimsoned, put his finger in his mouth, stared, and kept aloof.

"Come; see what I have brought you," and out of her pocket she produced a toy, a fine soldier on a horse.

The effect was magical: at the sight of it a light came into the boy's eyes; his cheeks glowed, and a smile broke on his face.

How like his father he looked at that moment.

"Well, come for it."

He ran to her, with an exclamation of delight, and Maud suddenly caught him up and covered him with kisses.

"Is dis for me, lady?" he asked, when she set him down again.

"Yes, my darling; will you love me for it?"

He put up his little chubby face to be kissed again immediately.

"I love ou velly much, lady: shall a take it hoam?"

"Yes, my darling, if you will tell me your name first."

"A dooant noo."

"Well, what do they call you?"

"'Little chap.' Sall a goa noo?" struggling to escape, clasping his toy.

"Yes, directly; tell me what you are doing here?"

"Putting pitty fowers on dood parson's bed," in a tone of surprise, as if she ought to have known.

"My darling!"

"Shall a goa noo?" looking eagerly into her face.

He ran on and Maud followed. At the gate he stopped; seeing her some way behind, he came running back and grasped her dress, crying out "Lady come too," trying to drag her on faster.

"Oh, so like him!" she thought.

Mrs. Lobb had set out her best china on the bright oak table, by the time Maud and the boy came in.

"Eh, little chap, and did the lady find you?" she exclaimed. "And what a dirty brat! oh, fie!"

The boy hung his head, the red shame mantling over his fat brown neck.

The sun had set an hour or more before Maud left Mrs. Lobb's cottage, and she did not go alone; the boy was with her: she had so resolutely insisted on taking him, that Mrs. Lobb could not gainsay her.

"I will bring him up and educate him," she had said. "If by any chance, inquiries should

he made, write and tell me; but do not mention my name if you can avoid it. If, however, you find it necessary to say where the boy is—say—say," here she trembled, "say he is being brought up by Miss Gwynne of Woodford."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"Though it is painful to the last degree to paint a man in the shades which his vices have cast upon him, yet when it serves the end (detestation of vice) it carries its own excuse with it."

Mr. Gwynne thought this a strange freak of Maud's, when she arrived at home the following evening. He was overjoyed to see her; but to bring a troublesome, common child with her; to rear and educate, oh, it was extraordinary!

"It's the little boy Hugh baptized last, papa; his name is John: he's a beautiful child, papa; feel his curly head," she said hurriedly.

"Very early, indeed; yes: whose child did you say?"

"The child that Hugh christened last, papa."

"Ah, well! my dear, you are drawn to the little thing, perhaps; but I must say it is a strange whim to wish to bring him up."

"It is, perhaps; but you will let me gratify it?"

"Of course, if you wish it; only it seems to me that you are drawing endless trouble on yourself: isn't she, Dolly Pritchard?"

"Humph," ejaculated Dolly Pritchard, screwing up her mouth.

Autumn has waned; the corn is carried, the potatoes are taken up in all the brown fields, and the harvest is in all over the country: the best harvest too, that has been known for years; although early summer foreboded nothing but ruined crops!

November, with its fogs and law-courts in London and its dry clear weather in the country, has passed; and in December Mr. Rolands comes ecstatic to Hafod. The lawsuit is gained: he is made happy for life, he says, and Mr. Gwynne is a very rich man. All this creates much excitement amongst friends and acquaintances.

At Forrestrange (which by-the-by was repainted, repapered and thoroughly purified for the Forresters' return, the end of autumn) they hear the news, and a queer feeling, amounting almost to envy, comes over Blanche: so, after all, Maud one day will be the possessor of Woodford!

The De Lisles are amiable people, and being tired of the country, profess their willingness to give the place up, whenever Mr. Gwynne chooses.

He accepts their offer and will return thither in the spring.

Stephen is very much changed since that attack on the brain. Dr. Moore had told him that he would not live a year if he continued in those habits; and now he tries to withstand the temptation of drink.

He is trying to make amends too. His wife little thinks *why* he is so much more patient, *why* he is so much more attentive, and *why* he brings her such beautiful presents these days: her little soul is quite satisfied, however, and they jog on wonderfully smoothly.

But Blanche, who has become impatient since her illness, frets, and is sharp upon her sister-in-law frequently; declaring she cannot brook Florence's absurdities: on which occasions Stephen turns wrathful. Florence is never spoken a sharp word to by him, while Blanche "gets it" famously. Stephen is dreadfully tired; only he is penitent, and thinks with disgust of his past life. "No use going on like that any more: no good at all."

Hunting revived him wonderfully; what he would have done without it is difficult to say, for really at times he could hardly bear himself: there is nothing like physical exercise for lightening mental woes; and this he discovered.

Christmas and frost came together; likewise Mr. Rolands with the half-yearly accounts to Forrestrange. Between the accounts and the frost, Stephen grew quite cross to Blanche, and wondered why the deuce she could do nothing to help with those confounded papers.

"Really," observed Mrs. Forrester, "I wouldn't worry myself, Stephen dear. I thought gentlemen never knew anything of business, only took the rents; and as to ladies, I never heard of anyone but Miss Gwynne having anything to do with that sort of thing. Then she is such an amazon!"

"Maud is a very clever woman," said Blanche: "Mr. Rolands, who has just been in Wales, says she transacts all her father's business matters, and when they return to Woodford, she is going to see after everything herself. They find that Roberts, their head man, cheated horridly. Oh, dear," she added, as Florence left the room, "I wish Florence were not quite so childish!"

"Blanche," exclaimed Stephen angrily, "you have no right to make any comparisons: I remember perfectly, if you don't, that you chose Florence for your friend, and discarded Maud; it ill becomes you, therefore, to say anything now," and out he stalked.

March having entered like a lion departed like

a lamb. The early spring flowers are beautiful at Woodford, and Maud (who arrived here with the rest a few days ago) has been round the flower gardens between the showers this April morning, and is returning to the house with Master John (who, still adhering to his passion for flower heads, has seized on divers, and stowed them away in his skirt), when just as they reach the front, the Forrestrange carriage, Stephen driving his wife and sister, sweeps round. Stephen sprang down, and greeted Maud warmly; the ladies alighted and salutations were general.

"And what is this little fellow you have with you, Maud?" asked Blanche.

The boy was staring with his large blue eyes and grasping Maud's dress; his hat was fallen off, and with his golden hair, curling all over his head, and his bright colour, he looked the loveliest child imaginable.

"What a beautiful child!" exclaimed Blanche again. "What is his name?—John? he don't look like a John: Stephen, did you ever see such a beauty?"

Stephen glanced down; he was no judge of infants, he said, but this little chap was a jolly little fellow.

"That was my name far away," said the boy, catching at the sound.

"Was it?" asked Stephen, amused.

"Yes, far away, wasn't it, Maudee?" (he had taken to call her 'Maudee' of late). "I was a little boy then," he added, quite patriarchally.

They grouped round him, and the child having said his say, became suddenly bashful and hid his face in Maud's dress; whilst she, her heart beating fast, would have given worlds to escape; being overwhelmed with dread lest the extraordinary resemblance should strike them. "It must; it must. Impossible not to see it!"

And like a poor guilty wretch confronted with a glaring truth, she reddened and paled by turns.

"What made you set him up?" asked Stephen,

"I took a fancy to the child—I—I found him asleep on my brother's grave," she answered.

They attributed her emotion to this recollection. The child then scampered away, crying out, "I did put fowers on the dood parson's bed, like this," and began spreading his flower heads. "Like this, big man," he said again; "and then daddy would tarry me high up: tan ou tarry me, big man?"

"Big man" (being Stephen) strode to the boy, hoisted him on his shoulders, and gave him a glorious ride.

"Well," he said, returning and setting him

down; "this is the finest little fellow I've ever seen."

"Don't say so to Maud!" said Mr. Gwynne, who with Mary had joined the group, "for she's quite absurd enough already about him. She announced him as her whim when she brought him home, and a downright whim he is too; there never was, nor ever can be such a paragon; he's the apple of her eye."

Maud rent the magnificent auricula she held in her hand into shreds.

"Pray, bear in mind she's present," she said, trying to speak nonchalantly.

"Well, my dear, where are you? there" (putting his hand on her shoulder), "take us all indoors?"

They went. The carriage was sent round, and the party stayed luncheon.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SOUTHERN FLOWER AND THE WESTERN BUD.

"For woman, Will, is a thorny flower."

THE sun shone bright that summer morning.

"Do close the jalousie, Stephen," said Mrs. Forrester; "I dislike the glare so much."

Stephen rose from the breakfast table. "It's a jolly day, Floy, the wind is so pleasant," he said, closing the blind.

"Is it? How nice it must be at Venice!"

"Venice? What made you think of Venice?"

"Mamma's letter. When shall we join them?"

"Join them? What put such an idea in your head?

"Oh, I am so tired of the country."

"Tired? Why, Floy, we have not been from London many weeks."

"I am tired of England altogether; we must go abroad, Stephen: I can't stay another winter in this country. I remember when you

used to call me your southern flower, and say I might live abroad if it suited my constitution better."

Blanche, from behind the antique silver urn, looked unutterable things.

"Nonsense, my love; it will never do to leave home constantly, like this," said Stephen.

"I am sick of this place." Floy pouted.

"You should have considered the matter before you adopted it as your home," burst out Blanche.

"Detestable old place!" rejoined Floy, shrugging her shoulders.

"You liked it once well enough, and thought it delightful," pursued Blanche: "at least you said so."

"But I thought there was more society in the neighbourhood!"

"Society?" broke in Stephen. "Why we are either out every day or have company at home; we were at two balls last week, and three dinner parties: until yesterday, the house has been full, and will be full again next week. I can't imagine what more you want, Floy."

"But we have no near neighbours. The people at Woodford are so stupid, and Miss Gwynne is such an amazon; she doesn't suit me at all;

and Mr. Gwynne being blind—oh, they're no neighbours!"

The old temper was rising in Stephen; all he said, however, was, "Well, there is not the slightest occasion for you to put yourself out of the way to visit there; I don't think they would take your absence much to heart."

"But I can't do without society," replied the lady, plaintively; "and besides, this place disagrees with me: you know that."

This was unanswerable: certainly she was always complaining, and getting hysterics here, though, perhaps, sufficiently lively elsewhere.

"Florence," he said after a pause, during which he cooled a bit, "I am anxious to further your pleasure in every way I can; but it is too much to ask me to spend a winter abroad, deuce knows."

Poignant ejaculations, ending in sobs, followed this speech. "She should die if she stayed the winter at Forrestrange! But, perhaps, that is what Stephen would like, &c. &c."

He was terribly annoyed; and had he possessed a clear conscience he would, in unmeasured terms, have spoken his mind as to her absurdities in general, and this new fancy in particular. But his right feelings had returned now that he was not enslaved by drink; and knowing he

had injured her, he was secretly trying to redeem the wrong.

Only yesterday, whilst riding out with Mary Gwynne, he heard Philip Bryan's name. She spoke of him enthusiastically, as one of her particular friends, and told the story of the shipwreck, the portrait of the pretty lady, and all. "Mary was perfectly innocent of everything; so was Maud, of course: oh, yes: no one knew anything. Of meeting Philip at the bridge, he had only a very confused notion: he was drunk, when some one knocked him into the river: Philip had done this he believed; but he knew nothing more: indeed it was upwards of a week before he was conscious, for he got that fit after. Maud was then nursing Blanche. No one knew how he had fallen into the river; they all thought it was an accident. However, it was all gone by now: he had sown his wild oats, and for the future he would be a decent fellow. The other way was no good; and by being kind to his wife the past would be expiated: of course."

And so it ended in Stephen saying he would go with her whenever she liked. Upon which Floy became better, presently smiled, and then chattered like a wren. But Blanche sat in silence, too angry and bitter to speak; until, breakfast being over, she remarked: "How well

Maud Gwynne looked last night! Did you notice her, Florence?"

"I *noticed* her, if you mean that: but do you really admire her, Blanche?"

"I do; she's a grand, intellectual-looking woman: my father always said she would be so. I can quite understand her not suiting you, Florence."

At which Florence, with no conception of the venom, merely shrugged her shoulders. And Stephen, without a word, walked quickly out of the room.

The Forresters went abroad, and spent most of their time during the following years on the Continent.

Years? yes; five years, over which I skip, as there is nothing to note: unless indeed I were to stop and chronicle Maud's offers of marriage—for she had more than one, since her father's reinstatement in his property had made her merits known.

"I am perfectly aware that I should bring four thousand a year to a man," said Maud one day to Miss Stanford, Mary's governess, who had become quite one of themselves, "and that I am very charming, and well fitted to adorn anyone's lot, &c. &c., as they tell me," she laughed. "But for all that I never will marry: I am happy as

I am; and I know I never could care sufficiently for any man, to accept him as my husband."

"It's very odd," replied Miss Stanford, "I cannot think how you, with your warm, affectionate nature, can be so indifferent to all men: gentlemen I mean, not mankind in the abstract."

"It *is* odd, I acknowledge; but you will believe me when I say there is not a man in the world for whom my heart would give one beat the faster, or my pulse quicken. I am independent, and have a comfortable home; why should I change?"

This conversation took place, after Maud had refused her third offer, and she was being taken to task by her friend.

Mary has grown into a very pretty girl, and John, certainly, is a splendid boy.

At Connomore everything is thriving. After that paralytic seizure, Mrs. Bryan kept her bed awhile, but got over it well eventually; and now goes into her kitchen of evenings as usual. She is in excellent spirits, for Philip is coming home again, and intends giving up California, the sea, and that style of thing for the future: in fact, at this moment he is on board the homeward bound 'Culloden,' now running with all sail set, before a fair wind, up channel.

His hot passion has had time to cool, and he is returning careless enough as regards Mrs.

M'Donaghan of Castle M'Donaghan (Bryan Mount having acquired this appellation), who is quite a devotee to her new religion, and the dark, handsome Jesuit chaplain, who lives in the house.

Mr. M'Donaghan troubles himself little on matters pertaining to the faith, having paid handsomely some time since for a bill of indulgence, which is kept framed and glazed in his room. To do him justice, however, he shows remarkable zeal as to the best method of having fish dressed on fast days.

It is August; the landscape is rich in deep-coloured cornfields, bright in green aftergrass, purple in wide-spread mountain heaths. The Gwynnes are at Hafod again, where the sea-ripples plash refreshingly, in the fair west wind.

To-day Mary has followed Maud and her father down to the beach, with a letter just brought from the post. It is from Philip Bryan; who says he has more money than he knows what to do with, and asks whether there is any property to be disposed of in the neighbourhood of Hafod; if so, he would wish to become the purchaser. He also wishes to know, where that little lawyer he met there once, is to be found; and if Miss Gwynne will kindly write to Connomore, he, Philip, will find the letter on his arrival: also, if quite convenient to Mr. Gwynne to receive a

visitor, he will only be too glad to come over for a week, shortly, &c. &c.

Maud wrote two letters by return of post; one to him, the other to Mr. Rolands; both containing invitations to Hafod.

Mary was enchanted; she proclaimed Dr. Bryan to be her especial favourite, and that the watch she wore was his gift.

With a queer, searching look, the governess watched Maud, as she wrote those letters; and, when they walked out on the beach afterwards, she said,

"I read you correctly, five years ago, Miss Gwynne: secret and strong; I understand!"

"Understand what? you puzzle me."

"Ah, it is *he;* the problem is solved!"

"Problem? He? What do you mean?"

"Prob: a first-rate handsome woman, loving, loved; remaining single, refusing every offer—what is the cause? I guess it all now."

"Dismiss the notion at once, and for ever!" exclaimed Maud. "You never arrived at a more wrong conclusion in your life, if you suppose that Dr. Bryan cares for me, or I for him, in *that* way."

"But evidently, there is some extreme friendship, or intimacy, or something of the kind."

"Miss Stanford," said Maud hurriedly, "circumstances—most painful circumstances, occurred

some years since, to draw us together; that is the reason of our intimacy. I must beg you, though, never to allude to it in any way; I have the greatest regard for him, and I believe he feels the same for me—nothing more. If you entertain other notions, you will vex me seriously."

Maud spoke decidedly; a tone that admitted of no trifling, and she and Miss Stanford walked on in silence.

Down in the surf the fishermen, or rather the fisherman, his wife and girls, were drawing the net, John and Mary hauling away at the rope with might and main. The flushed sunset sky was reflected in the beach pools, and on the wet sands; the scene and figures would have formed a good picture, and so Miss Stanford presently remarked; but Maud, walking quickly on, would not have her attention drawn to it, and the governess concluded she was offended.

"Pardon me," she said, "I fear I took a liberty——"

"No, no," interrupted Maud, "I ought to ask your pardon, for having spoken sharply. But there are some things that I cannot bear to hear discussed; amongst others, the friendship between Dr. Bryan and myself."

"I am truly sorry I remarked on it."

"On the contrary, I am glad now you spoke as

you did; it has opened my eyes to the construction others may put on our intimacy."

"Mr. Gwynne thinks as I did; I am sure of it: I saw an uneasy look come over his face whilst you wrote your letter. I believe he thinks there must be an attachment between you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Maud, laughing, though she was much vexed.

They had reached where the headland terminated in great rocks, up which the waves dashed, breaking into spray; and, turning to walk back, they saw Mr. Gwynne and Mrs. Pritchard in the distance.

"Poor papa!" said Maud. "How shall I undeceive him?"

Mr. Gwynne was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Pritchard. Let us hear what they say.

"Then you don't think so, Dolly?"

"Laws, master, far from it!"

"It never occurred to me till this evening; but the idea came, when I saw she lost not a post to reply to the letter."

"Maybe: but it's more sorrow for him she feels than nothing else."

"But, Dolly," pursued Mr. Gwynne, not half satisfied, "why is she so indifferent to everybody? It isn't natural she should be so; indeed, I cannot help thinking there is not that indifference *here:*

and Dolly, though I would not thwart her—I tell you I should not like it at all."

Mr. Gwynne stopped; striking his stick in the sand as emphasis.

"Lord bless you, master, you needn't worrit yourself."

"But I cannot help thinking it is so. Dolly, you can see her countenance; you brought her up, and you ought to be keen in guessing the truth."

"Keen, master? Laws! I think I know a thing or two."

Mrs. Pritchard led her master on, her lips tightly screwed up, for the next five minutes.

"Or, if I thought there was any chance of their becoming attached to each other," went on Mr. Gwynne, "I would leave Hafod this week; then, of course, we should see nothing of him. The young man is well enough, but I should object extremely to Maud's marrying an adventurer, as he really may be considered."

"Laws, master, never fear—there's no danger. My belief is missy will never marry. She knows too much of men and their wickedness." Again mammy pursed up her mouth.

"What do you mean, Dolly?"

"What I say, master."

"I wish you would speak plainly, Dolly?"

"Hem. Master, I'll say this; but you mustn't

ask me no further: if you had your two eyes sound as they were once, God help you! you'd be much in my way of thinking." And Mammy bridled up.

Mr. Gwynne stopped, and sighed deeply.

"Dolly," he said, turning his blind eyes on her, "it is cruel of you to hide anything from me. I am sure there must be some mystery or other——"

"Nothing to nobody, here, master. But, master, my belief is, that missy's a saint, as Master Hugh was before her. Talk of religion, and good works? Why her life is one great good work——"

"I know it," interrupted Mr. Gwynne. "She gives up everything for me: it must be a trial to live with a blind father!"

"Pish—that's not it at all, master!"

"What do you allude to then, Dolly?"

"I only wish you had my two eyes, master, then you'd see for yourself."

Again mammy screwed up her lips, and walked on, stiff and upright.

"Indeed you distress me more than you think, by hiding things from me," said Mr. Gwynne, sorrowfully.

"Missy has done angel's work, that's all," said mammy shortly.

Mr. Gwynne made no reply, beyond sighing again.

But at length mammy burst out: "Well, master, I can't bear to see you take on like this: and I'll tell you what's on my mind; for, in course, it will never go beyond. Truth is truth, and my belief is, that the boy she's bringing up is no more John Smith than you or me."

"What are you saying?" asked Mr. Gwynne stopping short.

"Saying my belief; and my name is not Dorothy Pritchard, if this child ain't a Forrester every inch!"

"Good gracious!"

"Yes, master; I'll take my Bible oath on it! Drek'ly I clapped my eyes on him, when missy brought him home, now five years past, I saw he was Stephen Forrester all over."

"God bless me!"

"It's quite true for you, master. I didn't nurse so much on master Stephen for nothing: this little fellow is him again, like as two peas."

"Dolly, you must be wrong."

"Tut, no, master; don't you recklect that Miss Bryan being here once. Well, I didn't like to put my s'picions into words then, but when in two years and a half after, missy brought the boy home, I guessed the truth like lightning; but

from that day to this, I never spoke of it till this moment."

Mr. Gwynne stood dumbfounded.

"The only thing as puzzles me," pursued mammy, "is how missy got hold on the little fellow; whether she knows, or whether it's accidental like: those 'straonary kind of things happen sometimes. Well, well, however it be, I know she loves the child above everything. And, master, she never cared for any one before her heart ran out in this way, but Stephen Forrester."

"My poor Maud!"

"Quite true, master; and I could have wrung his neck for him, when he married that chit: indeed, I did wish him all manner of evil, and it came too."

"Dolly, Dolly!"

"Yes, master, he punished himself well; but I wish him no more harm: he rues the day, I know. Yes; Dorothy Pritchard has not lived near sixty years in the world, without taking observations."

Mr. Gwynne removed his hat, that the breeze might blow on his head. Presently he said,—

"Dolly, I thank you for telling me what you have, and I shall act accordingly."

"You won't be for mentioning one word to

missy, nor no one in the world surely, master?" cried Mrs. Pritchard, in alarm.

"Never. What I mean is, that supposing the boy to be a peasant's child, I have constantly reasoned with her on the folly of bringing him up in this way, and I positively forbade her sending him to any but a good commercial school. It shall be different now: she may do precisely as she likes—is she coming, Dolly? I hear footsteps on the shingle."

Mrs. Pritchard turned to look.

"Yes, master, she and Miss Stanford."

CHAPTER XX.

RHIW.

"Look not mournfully into the past,
Wisely improve the present, it is thine.
Go forth to meet the shadowy future,
Without fear, and with a manly heart."

It is a week later; Philip Bryan has come to Hafod, and so has Mr. Rolands. Singularly enough, Rhiw happens to be in the market again, and the lawyer and his client are going to see the place. They discuss the distance at breakfast.

"And why don't we all go?" asked Mary. "I am sure Dr. Bryan would like to have us—that is, me—to walk with him this nice day."

"Decidedly," Philip assented.

"Well, we'll order the carriage: Maud, see to it," said Mr. Gwynne.

"Carriage!" said Mary; "do you suppose for an instant that *I'll* go in a carriage? certainly, not."

"Mary, don't be absurd," observed Mr. Gwynne; "you can never walk that distance."

"If you imagine that *I'm* going to be driven as if for a state visit, you will be mistaken, dearest papa."

Mary flung her arms round his neck, kissed him, and vanished out of the room, to put what she called her "hunting boots" on.

"Very eligible property this Rhiw, my dear sir," said Mr. Rolands, drawing on his gloves and buttoning them; "but you must decide on nothing until you have seen Llyndu, the other estate on sale."

"I have rather a fancy for this place," returned Philip; "this Rhiw I mean—it is nearer the sea."

"And so nice; such a dear old place: you know it belonged to papa's family long ago, only they spent all their money and had to sell everything. Papa took us there to see it, and I thought I should like to live there all the days of my life. Such a wood! such mountains! and such a view from the bank near, with the sea far away!" broke in Mary, who had just clumped back, all ready.

"Out of repair, and—damp," observed the lawyer. "But the estate highly desirable; now Llyndu has an excellent house on the

property. However, you can look about you: no hurry, my dear sir—none whatever."

"Oh, no, none," replied Philip, making up his mind there and then to possess Rhiw. He was tired of a vagabond life he thought, and wished to feel settled.

"Are you sure you can manage the walk?" asked Philip, when it was time to set out.

"Oh, yes! I walked it not long ago before: not at all too much for *me*, but too much for the boots I wore; I came home without soles. But, see now?" displaying her foot laced up in, not thin high-heeled "Balmorals," but genuine stout leather, "I could walk to the end of the world in these."

Philip laughed and strode off, Mary pit-patting at his side, until suddenly aware of the great rate he was going at, he stopped and offered his arm; this Mary scorned, and to prove she considered the pace rather mild than otherwise, began the ascent of the pass, which they had now reached, at a run.

They reached Rhiw some time before the others, and there being no signs of life about the house, and the hall entrance all barred up, they sat down under the great oak-tree, to wait for them.

"Ah, here we are," exclaimed Mr. Gwynne, as the carriage rolled over the flags under the

tower archway. "It looks just the same as it did when I was a boy, I suppose."

"Sadly out of repair—almost ruinous: damp, very damp, I should say," remarked Mr. Rolands.

The Hafod farm gig, containing Mrs. Pritchard, and Susan, the boy driving, now came up; and Mr. Gwynne desired the cloth to be spread on the grass near a spring, down a mossy walk to which, blind as he was, he was able to take them.

So the cloth was spread and the viands unpacked. There were cold chickens and slices of red ham, cold fruit tarts, a bottle of thick cream, a piece of cheese, a loaf, fresh butter wrapped round in a glistening cabbage leaf, wine, and a jar of beer; everything most satisfactory, even to the sugar in white paper, and the salt.

Whilst luncheon is going on, let us look at Rhiw. It is a very old house; that is, some parts of it; but additions of various dates make it a heterogeneous mass of building, ancient and modern. Very hard is it to find your way along that labyrinth of passages and staircases; for, excepting one great room at the top of a low flight of stairs, there is no particular difference in the wainscoted chambers to tell you whereabouts you are; and long passages, low dark rooms opening one out of the other, black oak-bannistered stairs,

and queer corridors in unexpected places, puzzle you, and set you at fault.

A broad gravel road separates the house from the clock tower and gateway. The clock has not been going these last fifty years, and the hand nailed to the dial, is still at five minutes to five. This was a conceit of the last Hugh Gwynne who lived here, for five o'clock was his dinner-hour, and then people would hurry over their dressing; always supposing they never looked at the clock save about dinner-time.

Huge trees stand singly on what was once a smooth lawn, and behind rises the great wood, terminating abruptly at the high wall, over whose flagged top, ivy, moss, and lichen have grown undisturbed for centuries. Beyond, the moorland stretches away to the lone tarn beneath the far off crags, now blue as indigo in the shadow of a passing cloud.

The other way, westward, where the dark firs stand grouped, the slope descends to the glen, which runs down to the marshes and flats on the coast. Far away is discernible the Hafod headland, and bounding all, the sea. Certainly Rhiw is just what Philip likes; this he thinks, as he sees what has been described.

But they must get into the house: perceiving a child's face between the bars of a gate

near, Maud goes off to make friends with the child, and discover where the people are; on both which points she is successful, and the front door is drawn creaking back by a middle-aged, decent-looking woman, who speaks English.

"Will the leddis an gentlemen please walk in and go over the place? They needn't trouble to take the key to her again; she will come and lock up after milking time: there is nothing in the house; they can go where they please. Where the farmer lives is separate; and they needn't trouble to come round."

Philip expressed great satisfaction at the interior.

"More like a beaver lodge than anything else; plenty of room for a hundred people, and lots of places to dodge and hide in, if need be."

Whether he thought of Indians or beavers, it is hard to say.

"King Charles was hidden here for six weeks, they say," said Mr. Gwynne: "there is a suite of secret rooms out of the saloon. I will take you there; lead me, Maud."

This was the one great room. Notwithstanding its eight windows, the light was dim, for the glass was stained with heraldic devices; and the ivy, too, crept round, and through several chinks had forced its way in, flourishing luxuriantly in the stately room.

Apparently there was no outlet but the great doorway; but Mr. Gwynne groped along the panelled wall half-way up the room, feeling for a secret spring, which he pressed; the panel flew open, and presently they were in the "King's chamber." A narrow winding stair led down to a passage underground, whence you came out on the moorland some distance from the house. By this passage Philip, Mary, and John now troop away, while Mr. Gwynne and the others retrace their steps, and by and by come to the great kitchen, where the enormous cooking apparatus in the vast chimney was wonderful to behold, being strong enough to roast whole beeves on great occasions.

The only tenant of the kitchen now is a white owl, which sits perched on an iron bar in the chimney. A dank, sooty smell pervades the place, and thick cobwebs hang from the black rafters and across the one large window. The offices are all damp, mildewed, draughty, and wretched, and so chilling, that Maud, on emerging into the open air in the grass-grown courtyard at the back, is quite glad to see a fire through the window of an outbuilding opposite; where sits an old man, in the chimney corner, leaning on a stick, his eyes fixed on the ground, with a baby asleep in a cradle, and a little girl dressing a doll.

"May we sit and rest?" asks Maud, entering.

"Why do you ask, when the settle and chairs are before you?" replies the old man.

"The fire is quite pleasant after coming through those draughts, my friend," said Mr. Rolands, airing himself.

"Why do you call me your friend? I know you've never seen me before," remarked the old man again.

"Do you farm the land?" asked Miss Stanford.

"Who asks such a foolish question? how can a useless old man like me do nothing?"

"Your son or daughter, perhaps," put in Maud, appeasingly.

"Ay, there's some sense in that: but there's none in their dragging themselves back here from where they bin settled this twenty years; for now word's come Rhiw's to be sould again, so if they get notice to quit, they must tramp again."

"Oh, perhaps you won't be turned out."

"Lord knows. I want to stop in the ould place till I go to my grave; I only want one more journey to the churchyard yonder, where they all are."

"Are your relations inhabitants of the district?" asked Maud.

"Ay, that they are, and were; my father, an's father, an's father before him, for aught I know, lived with the ould family in this here place. Walla! walla!"

Mr. Gwynne suddenly started up and groped towards him.

"Ellis," he exclaimed, "do you recollect Master Hugh?"

"Eh? Who is speaking?" The old man rubbed his dim eyes.

"Don't you remember Master Hugh—little Hugh Gwynne; he tumbled into the river once, below the falls, and you jumped in and saved him from drowning: don't you remember?"

"Remember? ay, that I do. What of the pretty child? I never seed no one to ask after him, for he was tuk away to England, and the place was sould; then we went to 'Merrikay,' and we only com'd back last May. What of the little one?"

"Here he is!" said Mr. Gwynne, feeling for the old man's shaky hand.

Old Ellis rubbed his eyes again. "My sight is clean gone," he said, "but if you be Master Hugh, you will take Ellis's hand. Walla! walla! I've been blind this many a year! *Is* it Master Hugh?"

"Yes, yes, and, like you, Ellis, he cannot see: where is your hand, my old friend?"

"Blind! Master Hugh blind! Eh, what from?"

"I don't know."

"Och, my heart, that's sore 'fliction indeed, truth, Master Hugh, to be blind! It com'd to me bekays of age, I reckon: I'm nigh on ninety; but for Master Hugh! och, walla! Was there no accident neither, Master Hugh, to 'count for it?"

"No, I suffered from anxiety of mind then."

"Och, my heart! the trouble druv the light from the eyes then: och, Master Hugh! the world has been a weary one to you, I fears. Och, the pretty boy you weer!"

Mr. Rolands fidgeted, and finally retired during this conversation; and Miss Stanford, it would seem, had caught a violent cold in the draughty passages, by the way she used her handkerchief.

Just then a tramp of nailed shoes was heard outside, and, preceding the men, in rushed two damsels, hot and breathless, who quickly spread the table with a meal consisting of bread, butter, cheese, oatcake, curds and whey, and buttermilk. At the same time three or four other women passed the window, to the dairy, with the milk. In a few minutes, all trooped into the kitchen, to be waited on by the fat-cheeked maidens. The

first to enter was a fine, portly, healthy-looking man, considerably past middle age; then came a tribe of men and boys, who filed to their places on the oak benches at the table without a word.

"Ellis, Ellis! where are you?" cried the old man. "Don't you see Master Hugh? come and make a bow d'rekly."

"'Deed!" exclaimed the portly man, who was too hungry for anything in the way of politeness.

"'Deed!" cried old Ellis, in an agony, "iss, for sure. Don't thee remember Master Hugh?"

"Master Hugh Gwynne!" exclaimed the portly man, suddenly aware of whom his father was speaking. "Master Hugh Gwynne! thee doesn't say so!"

He advanced and drove the circulation out of Mr. Gwynne's fingers, by the grip he gave. "Ellis, come forward; this is Master Gwynne! Come all of you, boys, and make your bows."

And up came five or six other Ellises, large and small, and tugged their hair.

What a to-do there then was! Mrs. Ellis and the two serving maids dived into a recess, reappearing with a table, which they carried and set down opposite Maud. In a trice the best china

was produced, and she was requested to make tea; and a very excellent tea they had, with fried ham and fresh eggs, which everybody enjoyed.

"Walla!" exclaimed old Ellis, when they all shook hands at parting, "to think that me and mine is onced more in the ould place, an' them as ought to own it furrined away! Walla! walla!"

"Mr. Rolands," said Philip that night, "I wish to become the purchaser of Rhiw. Settle the business speedily; I abhor delay. You are an honest man, I know, so I leave everything to you; only don't be dilatory: I can't stand that; and don't bother me."

"But, my dear sir, surely you will take time to consider the matter. The Llyndu estate ——"

"Do as I tell you: I will have Rhiw."

"But, bless me! important matters of this kind require careful consideration."

"Careful consideration be —— Well, never mind, do as I wish."

"But, my dear sir, you are hasty; you may repent: you have not thought of the pros and cons."

"Pros and cons! This is all: if Rhiw is to be had, purchase for me. I can pay its full value in hard cash. There! that's all I've got to say."

In two or three weeks the papers announced that the Rhiw estate had been disposed of by private contract, that the advertised sale would not take place, and that the purchaser was Philip Bryan, Esq., M.D., an Irish gentleman of great wealth.

CHAPTER XXI.

TALLYHO!

"'Tis the place, and all around it, as of old,
The curlews call."

STEPHEN and Blanche Forrester, in deep mourning, arrived at home after their long sojourn abroad. Unthought-of events burst suddenly at times: unforeseen tempests strew the sea with wrecks; pestilence flies, striking down the healthy, the weak, the young, and the aged alike with its deadly wings. And so it was with Mrs. Forrester: she caught a fever, and died in four days at Venice; a lovely, petted, spoiled child to the last.

Blanche was excessively shocked, indeed, made quite ill; but her feeling ended there. Stephen, with the impulse of his passionate nature, hung over his dead Florence, using every endearing epithet: he saw in the marble features the beautiful girl he had been bewitched with once,

whom he had taken from her father and mother, and whom he had injured deeply. Other memories the great reconciler, Death, cast away: it was only Florence, the lovely young Florence, he now remembered.

* * * * *

This kind of sorrow is not of long duration, and when he reached Forrestrange, whether from native air subtly causing the blood in his veins to flow with more power, or from other causes, reaction ensued, and now he stood out on the terrace, the fair west wind blowing on his uncovered head, by no means a broken-hearted man.

It was the latter end of October, a second summer, as if to make up for the boisterous September and drizzly early part of the month. The Gwynnes had returned from Hafod some weeks before they intended; for there was no getting out there at all, it was so wet, and between the rain, sea fog, and mountain mist, the place was by no means exhilarating. But as for Philip Bryan, as the fogs and rains came down, his spirits rose; and he took up his abode at Rhiw all alone, declaring it was just what suited him. The room he inhabited was prodigious to see, partaking of the nature of a wigwam, a ship cabin, a digger's tent,

and a curiosity shop. For although Philip had so rough an exterior, and for the last years had been what he called a "vagabond," he had an extraordinary love for beauty and art. Recklessness was one of his characteristics: indeed, he never seemed to know when to leave off whatever he was about; so his room, the great saloon at Rhiw, before he was there a month, was filled with first-rate pictures, beautiful statuary, and a magnificent piano, on which he could only play the Hundredth Psalm with one finger.

"His head, my dear," remarked Miss Stanford to Maud one day, "his head accounts for all this; but for the lower part, which is inferior—a tendency to the animal—it is the finest I have ever seen."

"He gives one the impression of strength and power," remarked Maud; "but I know so little of phrenology, and believe still less, that I could not judge of his intellectual properties."

"My dear, that's the very thing," interrupted Miss Stanford. "The fact is, Dr. Bryan has neglected his intellectual power, consequently the animal has developed itself needlessly, which accounts for his noble head being marred. I'm certain he's reckless and daring; weak in some respects, perhaps revengeful; strong in his hate or——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Mary, who had entered unnoticed; "you are making him out a regular tiger, and he isn't one bit; although he's strong, he's the kindest man I know." Mary's eyes flashed, and the conversation dropped.

"There's no country like old England, after all," said Stephen to himself, this fine morning. "Scent lies capitally to-day. I wonder whether Tracy has the dogs out—I shall be ready myself next month," and he began to whistle a hunting tune, but stopped short; for two men were cleaning the walk near, and of course it wasn't decorous to be light-hearted.

Far off, so far that the sound was heard indistinctly, a bugle blew; like the old hunter that was ambling steadily along the road carrying a bishop, but pricked up his ears and galloped off as the hunt swept by, Stephen pricked his (figuratively), and dashing down to the stables, was off in the direction of the sound.

"There they go," he shouted, as he came upon Upton Common, and saw a crowd of horsemen disappear over the brow of the hill.

He was just setting spurs to his horse, when who should suddenly appear, after seeing the hounds throw off, but Maud on her brown mare, and John on old Selim; John is in woe, and Maud is trying to comfort him.

"He is sure he can follow the dogs as well as anybody, why won't Maud let him? He wouldn't hurt if he *did* fall. It *is* unkind of Maud. He doesn't care, he *will* go next time: he *is* old enough. No, he *won't* canter on, and he *hates* going home."

The boy's tears blind him to the fact that Stephen Forrester is approaching, and not until he says, "How now, little chap, what's it all about?" does the child's passion subside, after which he begins to laugh, and starts off full speed.

Meanwhile Stephen and Maud shake hands, mutely. She has no idea what she ought to say, neither has he; but he turns his horse to ride homewards with her.

Now Maud had heard of Mrs. Forrester's death, but did not know of Stephen's return, and was very considerably surprised to meet him this morning; and this feeling of surprise had much more of pain than anything else—pain, to such a degree, that she regarded Stephen, as he rode at her side, with a repugnance she had never felt for any human being before; whilst for the beautiful, fearless child that now galloped back towards them, erect in his saddle, and with delight on his face, her whole heart gushed out in love.

Stephen remarks on the boy's noble appearance,

and as he comes up, with heightened colour, his golden ringlets all blown back, and bright loving eyes looking earnestly at Maud to see whether she "is friends," her breath almost stops. Any one *must* see the resemblance; it cannot be hidden much longer. He is so like!

Not like this Stephen either, who rides by her in a tightly buttoned black coat, looking grave enough, but with a countenance which past years of unsteadiness, and not thought, has lined. No, not like this Stephen, but that other Stephen who was noble, brave, and comely, and whom she thought the best of all God's creatures!

"How much the lad's grown," observes Stephen.

"Yes," assents Maud, briefly.

"He'll be a man in no time. What are you going to do with him?"

"He's going to school after Christmas." Maud's heart beat fast.

"Well, my little man," said Stephen (finding Maud not much given to conversation), "will you go out with me one of these days?"

"Shall I? shall I, Maudee?" cried the boy, in an ecstasy.

"Yes, yes, I know you shall," said Stephen, looking at the lad.

Oh, how like he was!

"Hurrah! all right!" cried Master John, starting off again at full gallop.

"I certainly never saw such a splendid boy: he was a protégé of poor Hugh, was he not?" said Stephen.

"Yes—no—that is, Hugh——" but the sentence was not completed: strong hatred was growing up in Maud's heart for the questioner; her nerves were tingling, and her face was on fire.

But Stephen rides on, all unconscious: he can't make out why Maud, who never is mysterious, should be so now.

"I must ride up to see Mr. Gwynne," he says when they reach the Woodford gate. So he follows Maud through, and they go up together, John being in advance.

Mrs. Pritchard happens to be at a window as they near the house. As Stephen springs from horseback, and assists Maud to alight, mammy indulges in a strenuous shake of the fist; after which the good soul seems relieved, and speedily goes downstairs, to see that there is a "proper" luncheon.

CHAPTER XXII.

AULD LANG SYNE.

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

AUTUMN, winter, passed; and spring had arrived once more. Blanche now planned as much to bring Stephen and Maud together again, as she had formerly planned to separate them.

She wished Stephen would be sharp and look about him. She never saw any woman get so much attention as Maud did now from everybody; why, at Riversdale, last night, it was quite absurd. Stephen kept so in the background: perhaps he didn't notice; if not, it should be pointed out to him; oh, yes, indeed, he ought to have his eyes opened.

All this time Stephen was not indifferent to Maud? Oh, no. The old love, which he had struggled against of late years, had set in like a flood tide. He was free to love her: that in

itself was huge happiness; but he was studiously careful not to annoy her by marked attention: he saw she did not like it. No, he would be patient; perhaps she thought it rather soon?

"Confound that fellow Tracy! what the deuce made him take her down to dinner yesterday, when some one else was told to do so?" (that "some one else" being Stephen himself).

Not a pleasant day this morning. There was nothing particular to do; he may as well walk over the meadows to Woodford to have a chat with Mr. Gwynne: yes, he would go.

Having made up his mind to this, he went indoors to breakfast.

"Good morning," said Blanche, pouring out the coffee. "Is it pleasant out of doors?"

"No, rather chilly."

He stabs a chop, and muffin, and deposits both on his plate.

"Will it do for walking?" asks Blanche, between sips of coffee.

"Walking? where to?"

"Oh, I thought of going over to Woodford. I think we've neglected Mr. Gwynne rather of late; his blindness makes him so very dependent: I've a great mind to spend the day there."

"How odd! I thought of going there too."

"Well, do, Stephen; he'll be so glad to have

you to talk to: in that case I won't go, one is enough at a time. By the by, what a nice cook they have at Woodford; small dinners, but so good! I wonder where they got her? Much better cooking at Woodford than at Riversdale; don't you think so, Stephen?"

"No comparison; everything was cold last night. What a buffoon Tracy made of himself! Did you observe? He was the fool of the company."

"Yes, he talked incessantly; he must have bored Maud exceedingly. How well she looked, Stephen."

"By Jove, yes. Do you know, I consider her handsomer as a woman, than she was as a girl. Do you remember my father always said it would be so? How fond he was of her!"

"Really, I thought she looked quite regal last night: she dresses so well; that black velvet, with the diamonds, becomes her exceedingly. She doesn't look like a spinster, does she, Stephen?"

"Not the least; I hear she has refused several fellows."

"Do you know what I heard some time ago?" asked Blanche.

"How can I possibly tell?"

"I was told that Maud Gwynne was single because she never cared but for one man."

"Who?" asked Stephen.

She looked him full in the face.

"Yourself—Stephen Forrester."

He reddened to the eyes, pushed back his chair, rose, and strode out of the room, saying,—

"What nonsense you talk, Blanche!"

* * * * *

"A very jolly day after all," thought Stephen, as he descended the hill.

At that hour Mr. Gwynne was holding a cabinet council with Dolly Pritchard.

"I can't imagine what makes her think of imgrating so soon, Dolly."

"What's migrating, master?"

"Going to Wales, in this case, Dolly."

"Well, why shouldn't she think of it?"

"I am rather uncomfortable at knowing she wishes to go."

"Why in the world, master?"

"Well, to tell truth, Dolly, I care very little for this Dr. Bryan to be thrown in her way."

"Oh, master, what nonsense! she don't care twopence for all the Dr. Bryans in the world."

"I'm glad you think so, Dolly, but——"

"Tut, master, not twopence. But if it had been otherwise, what's your jecshuns? I think he's a particularly nice gentleman, and has bought

the old place and all. Laws, master! I see no jecshuns whatever."

"Oh, I believe him to be a very praiseworthy young man in many respects, but I must confess I don't desire Maud should——"

"You would like Squire Forrester better for a son-in-law?" Mrs. Pritchard bluntly interrupted.

"Well, Dolly, I am very fond of Stephen, and somehow I feel persuaded he likes Maud; but you cannot think what a wide space she metes out between him and herself."

"Reely, master, that's true; she *is* awful haughty to him, for all his doting on her, though he tries to hide it his best; here she comes" (softly). (Aloud) "Then you'd like to try that lotion for the eyes, master?"

Mrs. Pritchard departed, as Maud came in.

"Well, papa, are you reconciled to the idea of Hafod for next month?"

"Rather soon for the sea-side, is it not?"

"Oh, no; I think early summer delightful in Wales."

"Early summer, yes; but it won't be early summer for many a long day yet."

"Well, as you like, papa; but I——"

"Maud, will you answer what I am going to ask you truthfully?" interrupted Mr. Gwynne.

"Certainly."

"Have you an attachment, my dear?"

"A *what?*"

"An attachment: do you care for one person more than for another?"

Maud laughed.

"I am not laughingly inclined, Maud; for seriously I am in dread you have a preference for that Irishman, Dr. Bryan."

"Oh, papa, but for your looking anxious and harassed, I should tease you well! Nothing of the sort, I assure you: Dr. Bryan and myself could never be anything but friends; the best of friends, though——"

"Well, my dear, pardon me. I wish you would not be so cold to your old friend Stephen," said Mr. Gwynne, after a pause.

She played with her father's white hair for a moment, then her large grey eyes flashing, she suddenly cried,—

"Papa, I hate him!"

"My dear Maud!"

"I do," she went on, impetuously; "and it is because I hate him, and because he comes here so often, that I want to go away: there, you have the truth now."

"Maud!"

"Yes; and it drives me wild that you should

encourage him to come, when you ought to know I don't desire his visits."

She was getting into a passion. Her eyes were luminous, as if a fire burnt within, and she spoke in hot haste.

"Maud!" exclaimed her father again.

"It's quite true, papa, and I'm only saying what I've wanted to say before: it *does* almost drive me wild, that you should always be so glad to see him!"

"But, my dear, I *am* glad to see him: he comes to see me."

"You *know* it is not you he comes to see, papa."

"Well, Maud, grant that; why this objection to Stephen? Do you never intend to marry?"

"Never. I hate men."

Mr. Gwynne could not help laughing in turn now. He knew she was in a great passion, and that presently a fall of tears might be expected; he was right, they came hot and fast. Here the door opened, and Stephen himself was ushered in.

As he looked anxiously at her, her expression became so haughty that he was forced back on himself; though he would have given the world to know what had grieved her, and was ready to issue forth and slay whomsoever or whatsoever had caused her this distress.

He was obliged, however, to keep his chivalric

feelings down, and entered into conversation with Mr. Gwynne—a vague and desultory proceeding just now. But when Maud, taking the opportunity of a discussion on the thinning of a certain oak wood (wherein Stephen got completely lost), rose, and went out, he could stand it no longer, and followed.

She had walked hastily down to the avenue. He soon overtook her; nothing now could keep him back, although in her eyes might be read, "How dare you follow me?"

"He could not bear to think she was in sorrow," he said.

"Indeed," she replied, in unmistakable scorn.

"You don't know the suffering you cause me," he went on.

What could make Maud forget all her kindliness then? Not one spark of it had she in her heart, as she turned to retrace her steps, saying,—"You are very good; but, thank you, I scarcely need your sympathy."

But he was not to be daunted; he forgot everything, overlooked everything. His whole nature had been roused when he saw her tears, and though for a brief time he had been chilled by her manner, now nothing could prevent his speaking.

"I did not intend to say anything yet, but

I cannot help it," he went on, hurriedly. "Maud, I love you with all my life and strength: there, it is out now."

Presently she spoke, without the least hesitation or nervousness.

"I would have spared you this: you know it; but you seem to be wilfully blind. Unless, indeed, you have misinterpreted me. Strangely have you been misled, if you suppose your words give me pleasure."

"Words, Maud? I hardly know what words I am using. I only want you to understand that you are dearer to me than anything in the world."

He spoke rapidly; he was under a kind of delirium, and tried to clasp her round, but she shrank away and said,—"I shall hate you if you touch me;" when his arm dropped to his side. She was too incensed to see his misery. Now, indeed, her coldness vanished, for the blood coursed in her veins at fever heat.

"You have outraged me," she said; "you have paid no regard to my feelings. You have persisted in speaking when you saw that I had no wish to listen."

"I see how it is," said Stephen, in a low voice, his face ashy white; "you have conceived dislike to me. You cannot forget that I was

once a drunken brute. Oh, yes; I remember it as well as you do: I remember your coming to Forrestrange, and seeing the beast I was there. You cannot forget, and you cannot forgive."

Nature had bestowed on Maud a fine ear, and, notwithstanding her hot temper, she knew there was in his tone agony and remorse. It is a true woman's nature to be merciful, just as it is her nature to drop tears after passion; and so, when Stephen had said this, Maud melted into tears and mercy simultaneously.

"Oh, Stephen, it isn't that; I am sorry, deeply sorry, to have wounded you: I want to be good friends with you, indeed I do; but I cannot be anything more."

Just now Master John (who had not yet gone to school) darted from behind a tree, where he had been lying in ambush to startle Maud as she came by. A most satisfactory start she gave, as he sprang out of his hiding-place with a shout, and he looked up in her face with much glee. But when the child saw she was crying he glanced at Stephen, and, perceiving his moody look, instantly thought he had been unkind to Maud; so, drawing up his slight frame, he clenched his little fists and stood confronting Stephen with the savageness of a young lion.

At any other time the ridiculousness of the thing would have made Stephen laugh; but now, smarting with pain, jealousy fired him, as the sharp conviction struck him that Maud loved this child too well to care about anything else: if a favourite dog of hers had come across his path, it would have been kicked out of the world there and then. The boy was standing straight up, quivering all over.

"I will kill you," he said, "for making Maudee cry," and he rushed at Stephen in blind childish fury.

In another moment he would have been flung a dozen yards off, but Maud, deadly pale, seized Stephen's hands and held them tight.

"You young dog," began Stephen; when Maud, shaking like an aspen leaf, cried,—

"Let the boy be! oh, you don't know what you are about! If you hurt him, you will make me wretched."

"Little you care for my wretchedness," said Stephen, dropping the boy.

Maud suddenly rallied. "Stephen," she said, "once for all, you must have done with this. Your friend I am, and shall continue; but anything more I cannot be. Good-bye."

Stephen went home. Blanche saw he was terribly unhappy, and bit her lips, but said nothing.

Stephen lay late next morning, not knowing any reason why he should rise, as life and the world would be flat, stale, and unprofitable henceforth. Himself had made it so; he knew that: truly he was reaping bitter wages. Cain was not more cursed; so he groaned, in mental anguish, until it occurred to him that perhaps it would be a good thing to say his prayers. He hardly knew how—he had not prayed for years and years; but he remembered his father never rose from bed in the morning, or lay down at night, without kneeling at the bedside. He remembered, too, being brought to his father's room—this very room he was in—every day, to say "Our Father" at his knee. Yes, he remembered it all now; the standing afterwards to say, "I believe" with clasped hands, and all.

Springing up, he sank on his knees, and bowing his head, hardened, careless Stephen Forrester felt as a child. Who may tell what change came into his heart during the hour he remained thus?

One thing is certain: he rose from his knees weak as after illness; and then he made a vow to be in all things what his father would have him be—his noble, virtuous father, who scorned a lie and all that was base, and did his duty in that state which it had pleased God to call him

to. Did he, Stephen? No, he did nothing—had done nothing, but follow his own pleasure since he had taken his father's place; it should be different for the future.

And it *was* different too. To the amazement of people, Stephen Forrester became an active country gentleman, attending justices' meetings, county meetings, and the like; all which institutions he had hitherto ignored. He took his place amongst the county gentlemen, where his father had been great, and astonished them by his sense and vigour; for until now, he was only known as a good-natured, careless fellow, a sort of nonentity, who took no part in county affairs.

Not that he took the least pleasure in the path he chalked out for himself, for business of all sorts was distasteful to him; only he persevered in it. His quick and energetic ways brought the old squire vividly before the magnates of the town-hall at Frorn; and one day, after he had expressed himself on a certain subject with plainness and directness, always keeping to the point, the magistrates' clerk, our old acquaintance, Mr. Rolands, suddenly got up from the table, and looking over his spectacles, said, "Bless my soul!" and at the close of the meeting rushed to Stephen, and shook hands tremendously with him, exclaiming,—

"My dear sir, you are a true Forrester after all."

To be sure, when the Gwynnes left for Wales, the neighbourhood became insipid, for although Maud did not, Mr. Gwynne always welcomed Stephen warmly at Woodford, and frequently he went there, notwithstanding what had passed. Mr. Gwynne audibly expressed his pleasure at Stephen's new activity; Maud was silent on the subject, until one evening he came there, and said he "would have no more to do with county matters: he was bored to death." Suddenly Maud said, "You are wrong, Stephen: your father unflinchingly performed his duties, why shouldn't you?"

That was all she said, and perhaps it did not sound very amiable, but it was enough to keep him up nevertheless. As for Miss Stanford, she was amazed at Maud: how she could be so cold to Mr. Forrester! whom Miss Stanford judged to have every good quality inherent.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LIGHT.

"Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder?"

"How it pours! surely, Dr. Bryan, you can't think of walking back to Rhiw to-night?"

Mr. Gwynne perceptibly fidgeted, but hospitality bade him second Maud's speech.

Philip glanced round; it would seem the invitation was not sufficient.

"Oh, I don't think he'll melt in the rain, he's neither salt nor sugar," said Mary, as he hesitated.

"You are right, I am not," replied Philip, rising and taking leave.

"Nonsense, Bryan, you had much better stay," said Mr. Gwynne, relenting, hearing the torrents outside.

Again Philip hesitated, and again during the hesitation Mary broke in:—

"Why do you urge him to stay, papa, when he doesn't want to? He said he must go home; I hate people to be stopped."

"Good-night," said Philip; "I must be off," and off he was, without waterproof or overcoat of any kind, and in five minutes was wet to the skin.

Mary was properly lectured by Miss Stanford for pertness, the only effect of which was a grand toss of the head, which sent Maud out of the room to laugh; she had a keen sense of the ridiculous to-night.

They had been at Hafod for some days. Philip walked over from Rhiw this afternoon; the clouds, which were lowering then, had burst now: the night was pitch black; every rivulet had risen to a torrent; the hill-road had become a watercourse, and every flat a pool.

Splash, splash, went Philip up the streaming road: it was so dark he could not see his hand. On he tramped, however, until he reached the brow above Hafod, where, pausing an instant for breath, he turned to look seawards; but it was so dark, that even the low-hanging cloud was not visible.

"Is that the light at Hafod? Hafod is not in that direction. What can it be? There is only sky and sea out yonder."

The light shimmered. For a moment he stood wondering. His mind must have been very much preoccupied, or the truth would have burst on him. The wind was blowing steadily from the sea, and this red light was increasing, or coming nearer every moment: in the darkness, he could not tell which.

At last it flashed upon him. "A ship on fire!" he shouted, with all the force of his strong lungs, though there was nobody to hear; and running down to Hafod with all speed, he rushed in, exclaiming: "Send to the farm for men; tell them to follow me down to the beach: there is a ship on fire, driving before the wind, on shore. Help will be needed."

Out into the night he rushed again, followed speedily by others. A lurid glow lit the beach below; the burning ship was driving fast ashore, like some horrible demon flaming in the darkness; and the people on shore could plainly see crowds of human beings on board!

"Merciful Father!" cried Maud.

Philip, apparently, was as cool as if there was nothing the matter. "We must wait till she strikes," he said.

On she came, right inshore. Long, shifting shadows were cast on the gleaming sands, shadows of people running hither and thither. On she

came, a great ship, her masts and yards and strong rigging showing like delicate tracery against the fire astern.

Hark! was that a cry? Yes, and those on the beach take it up; for, see! tongues of flame are licking the foremast, and those poor wretches are dropping off by twos and threes into the water!

"Merciful Father!" cries Maud again; while Mary, half frantic, clings to her.

The ship strikes: there again. She will never float more! The breakers thunder over her and deluge her from stern to bow.

With the backwater of a spent wave, Philip strikes out into the sea. He has need of his enormous strength to breast the crashing breakers; it does not fail him, and he reaches the ship. A moment there, shouting, "All who can swim, come—the beach is close by—to make fast the end of a rope," and he has gripped the captain's wife and is bringing her ashore.

The people on the beach, in the surf, work right gallantly; plunging in to give a helping hand to those who swim from the ship.

"Here he is—look, Maud!" cries Mary, as, lifting his burden, Philip carries the woman clear of the waves, and lays her down by Maud.

"She'll be all right directly," he says, and rushes back to his work.

Again he plunges into the sea; his strength was great, and he was utterly fearless: he seemed to have iron endurance, for when he returned a second and third time, on each occasion bringing one of the crew ashore, he was not exhausted. A fourth time he breasted the waves, never seeming to know when he had done enough; although the people were shouting to him to desist, for they thought all had left the wreck. And so they had: some by the rope, some swimming, and were being helped from the water by men, women, and children, up to their waists in water, working for life and death; excepting one old negro, whom Philip had seen lying half stupefied, against the bulwark.

There are limits to human strength, and struggling, sinking, and buffeting, Philip only just gained the land in time to be dragged out of the surf. They carry him to the shingle, where they lay him down tenderly.

"Maud," whispers Mary, "is he dead? Has he saved them all, and must he die himself?"

Maud bends over him: the great strong man is quite cold and still; and presently Mary falls on the shingle. A loud crash heard above the roar of the sea makes all eyes turn seawards; the great pillar of fire is swaying, and down goes the mainmast, strewing the waves with light.

Directly afterwards the foremast fell, and then darkness came over all.

"What's the matter?" asked Philip, suddenly starting up; "what's the matter, Miss Gwynne?" Was there ever such an extraordinary mortal? He rose to his feet, shook himself, and was apparently as well as ever. "Do tell me what the matter is?" he asked again, for it was quite dark and he could not see what Maud was about.

"Mary has fainted," she said; "the excitement was too great for her; but she is coming round: I have seen her have these attacks before."

"I'll carry her up," he said, without more ado, and he lifted her in his arms, and was off.

* * * * *

How fair and soft broke the morning! The sun shone on cascades foaming down the hill-sides, on the green earth, on the rippled beach, and on the wreck amid the breakers. The sky was flecked with light clouds, which sailed slowly across the summer blue, and, not being caught by the mountain tops, soon passed out of sight.

The beach will again be a scene of life. With the rising tide, the ship's cargo is coming ashore: cotton bales, some not damaged, some singed, broken up, good for nothing.

"There is no life lost, so there is no need to bemoan," Philip says.

He is well and strong as ever this morning, and is going to march off with the whole crew to Rhiw. He only waits now to see Mary, who has not yet come down; but she is well, Maud says, only rather nervous and pale. But Mary is so long making her appearance, that Philip, who sent word with the dawn to have plenty of everything ready, has to be off; for every morsel of food, and every drop of beer, was consumed at Hafod last night.

It would seem he gets tired of his company, for early in the afternoon he is back again. Mary happens to be indoors; the rest are on the beach: that doesn't matter; he tells the servant he will wait for their return.

Mary starts up on his entrance.

"Oh!" she exclaims; "I am so glad you are come: I was afraid I should not see you for ever so long, and ——," but her impetuous speech came to a sudden end, and, blushing scarlet, she turned away as if recollecting herself.

"I am glad to be here," said Philip briefly.

Then came a pause.

"You were unkind to me last night," said he, abruptly, presently.

"How?" asked Mary.

"You didn't wish me to remain here."

"On the contrary, I fancied you were indifferent about stopping."

Mary looked out of the window. There was an animated scene on the beach; perhaps it absorbed her, for she never turned round when Philip came to her side and, following the direction of her eyes, said,—

"Takes me back to the time I was wrecked below; you hardly remember it, I dare say—you were so young."

"I do remember it, though."

"I was an old man to you then; now, perhaps, I may be an old fool," he blundered.

This speech argued very considerable weakness in Philip, great strong fellow that he was. He should have known better than to stand talking thus to a girl not quite half his age. Was it his love of the beautiful, too, that gave him such wonderful delight in gazing into the depths of her violet eyes, as she turned and looked up in his face?

"Why should you say that?" she innocently asked.

"Ay," he said, still looking, "you *are* a child to me."

As if impelled by force, which he could not withstand, he stooped and left one long kiss on her lips.

* * * * *

Mrs. Bryan was a very fine old lady, and though her paralytic seizure had weakened one side of her body, still she looked fresh and healthy. Philip much wished her to live with him: he could not live at Connomore—she knew that; besides, there was nothing for him to do there. But he soon understood that, at her advanced time of life, a breaking up of old habits and associations would be her death; so he ceased to press the point, and promised to visit her once a month from Wales, which promise he intends keeping punctually.

"And a powerful happiness it will be to me to see you, me boy," she had said when they came to this conclusion. "It will be better than my wearying over the sea to you; better than your stopping here entirely, with your father's place staring you in the face, and you having only a few acres of land to call your own and walk over; that other cramping you in, like. Better for you far, me boy, to have plenty of room: but you'll be sure to come over every month, won't you?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ARRAIGNED.

"We do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy."

People say that Stephen Forrester will stand for the county at the next election; he has become so very active, and does so much, and is making himself so very popular. Oh, yes, of course, that's it—he intends coming forward as a candidate; several of the Forresters were in parliament in their day, and why shouldn't he? So people said and thought when Stephen attended everything there was to be attended: even boards of guardians, and parochial matters; but his father had done so, therefore he would.

This morning a rather peculiar case was brought before the magistrate.

An infant had been left some time ago in a dying state by its parents, at a lodging-house in the town. They were emigrants on their way to

Australia, their passage had been taken and paid for, and the ship was to sail the following day. On their way through Frorn, the child had been attacked by an illness, which the doctor who was called in thought must prove fatal. The parents wept and bemoaned, but they were poor, and they must go; so the child was left, a little money being given to the woman who undertook its care, with a promise of more, should it live, and that they would write respecting it, on their arrival at Melbourne. Time went by: contrary to all expectation, the child lived, and was now a fine healthy girl; but the parents had never been heard of, and the woman, being poor, could not afford to keep it.

The plain, rough statement of the woman as she told the story, intermingling it occasionally with her own unvarnished opinions of the parents, struck Stephen with mortal sickness; her words were like scorpion stings, and he thought she must be mocking him, and doing it on purpose. Every fibre of his frame seemed scorched, parched, burning; the drops stood out on his forehead, and he looked like a man in deadly pain. Making a violent effort, he got up and went out.

Shame and remorse presently gave way to another feeling, an unquenchable desire to ascertain whether *his* child was alive. It might be;

the story he had just heard, was a proof of the tenacity of life in infants. He had never thought of this before; but now, this new-born idea would not suffer him to rest an instant, and without an hour's loss of time he took the train down a western line.

All the night long, while the other occupants of the carriage slept, he tried to penetrate the past—as for reviewing it, he could not—and sought to recal his feelings when he took a hurried journey in this direction before. He had only a shadowy recollection of haste, of an overpowering desire to hurry his companion away to where strangers and foreigners would be ignorant and unsuspicious. He remembered, too, his dismay at finding it imperative to stop short of the seaport to which he was hurrying; the event, in anticipation of which this wild journey from the known to the unknown had been taken, occurring in the night; that the child being weak, had died before they left; and his determination to hide the shame, more for *her* sake than his own. And this had been done: her disgrace had never got wind—how could it?

He had never reflected on the possibility of the child's living: they said it could not; and as he had bestowed a purse of gold on the nurse, his conscience had not been troubled by considerations

of that kind. Of course he had not left the slightest clue; for the ring he gave was plain, without crest: he would not have given it, but he was so tortured when the woman hesitated, that he scarcely knew what he was doing. It was a plain ring: was it though? Now—to-night—this moment, for the first time since, it flashed across him, with a sharp pain which stopped his breath, that his father's name, ay, and date of death, were engraved inside!

For an instant his heart stopped beating, and then with loud throbs seemed to "knock at his ribs."

Day was breaking; his journey was nearly done. The train stopped; Westcliffe was close at hand.

The eastern sky was flushing red as he walked to the village, and in dark relief to the morning glory stood the tall cypresses and yew-trees in the churchyard.

But the glorious sky of the coming day might be dim as the west yet was, for all he saw or noticed: he was as a man walking in his sleep, unconscious of external circumstances. He went straight on: ah, here is the place! he recognized the low, roof-windowed village inn instantly.

A girl was washing the steps, which, according to the fashion of the age in which the house was built, descended to the interior.

He passed her and went into the parlour: he remembered it well; the crack in the ceiling was there still. He remembered that morning when he paced to and fro in a frenzy of impatience, waiting for *her* to be taken to the carriage which was drawn up in readiness at the door. He remembered the relief it was to his mind when they were off, and she comfortably located in the great town yonder, none the worse for the flight. Soon after she returned to Ireland. The next thing he heard was, that she was married; and he was glad to hear it: it was the most satisfactory thing that could have happened.

Would the people of the house never get up? His impatience was almost as great now as then: he could not be still, and walked out.

The grass-grown court of the stableyard told of a time gone by, and of the little use it had in the time present. Twice every day in former years the "royal mail" had stopped to change horses here, bringing life and bustle along the now deserted road; now there was only a deaf old man in the vacant yard, the would-be ostler, who trotted up and down waiting for the orders that never came; and one old horse, high-boned, dromedary-necked, which alike stood ready for the job that never was wanted.

The landlady, attired in a vast wrapper and a cap of wonderful frillage, made her appearance on his return. The same person; he knew her directly.

"You are early, sir," she said. "Rose tells me you 'ave been awaitin' for breakfast a time gone."

"Yes," said Stephen; "send something in at once. Hem! the place looks empty; it wasn't so formerly."

"Laws, sir, no! it *was* a place then."

"People stop here sometimes, I suppose?"

"Very rarely, unless they've some call to do so, sir."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, gentlefolk as 'ave known the neighbourhood before, or something in that way, sir."

"Pray do you remember a lady being taken ill here some years ago?"

"Laws, sir, as plain as yesterday; a sweet pretty creature she was too. Her husband dragging her hoff so soon was enough for her life; but he *must* go to catch the steam-packet, and she would not stay behind. He was hoverland for Hindia, I believe, sir."

"The child died?" asked Stephen.

"Died, sir? not to my knowledge: it came

up wonderful; but the little thing has been gone from here many a long year."

"Lived, and taken away?" he demanded, in a loud voice.

"Yes, sir. He was the finest child possible; a downright brave boy, when he was took."

"Where does the nurse live?"

"In the village, sir; the cottage on the right, after passing the churchyard."

Down the village street he went, where now the doors were being opened. Past the rectory, by the churchyard gate where the dark trees threw long shadows in the early sunshine, to the first cottage. There a decent-looking woman was standing in the doorway, swathing her cap with a band of black ribbon, her mouth being the receptacle of the pins necessary for this portion of her toilet; to use her own expression, she was struck all of a heap, when she saw the grand-looking gentleman, but guessed in one minute what he came after.

"Are you the nurse that took charge of an infant some years ago?" he asked, jerking out his words.

"Yes, sir," replied Mrs. Lobb, curtseying low, scarcely knowing whether she stood "on her head or her feet."

"Ah, you had a good deal of trouble with it?

Was it quite strong and healthy when the lady—the child's mother—sent for it?"

He concluded, of course, that *she* had done so.

"Well, sir, the boy was as fine a child as need be," said Mrs. Lobb, evasively.

"Do you ever hear—from—the lady?"

"Frequently, sir." But Mrs. Lobb was too honest to let him continue in his belief that the mother had the boy; so, faltering, she said, "Oh, sir, it wasn't *that* lady as took him away."

"Who then?" he asked, sharply.

"Oh, please, sir, not to ask too particular; he is right well off, I can say that."

"You must tell me where he is," said Stephen, decidedly.

"Please, sir, I must write and ask whether I may or not."

"Write and ask! Why, woman, there is some dishonesty or other. Perhaps you have sold the ring too?"

Now Mrs. Lobb could not brook this; besides, she remembered she had been told to confess, if it was needful for her own sake.

"No, sir," she said, indignantly. "You can have it for the asking; but it's a long way from here. Maybe the name of the lady is quite unbeknown to you."

"What is it?" he asked, sharply.

"Miss Gwynne of Woodford," said the nurse.

Stephen, clapping his hand to his side, staggered back, and fell against the wall, as if struck by a blow.

"Miss Gwynne! Woodford! the boy with *her!*"

Mrs. Lobb was just running for assistance, when Stephen sprang up, and, between quick gasps for breath, asked hurried questions. Then he heard the story, which brought the tears to her motherly eyes in narrating. Stephen, when the story was done, turned away in silence; and in a blundering, stunned kind of way, he turned into the churchyard.

"Hugh Gwynne, the friend of his boyhood, Maud's brother—Hugh! that in those degrading years he had quite forgotten, that he had left unsought, whose living place even he was ignorant of. Just Heaven! Hugh was the rector of Westcliffe, and died here soon after *that time;* caught cold, the woman seemed to think, from going out to baptize the child. . . . . Oh, Maud, my good angel! never can I dare to seek your love more—never more."

He sat down on a tombstone, feeling as if his brain must burst: he thought he should go mad.

The shame, remorse, pain, wretchedness of his whole life pressed upon him at this moment,

tenfold; and he felt the best thing for him to do would be to end his miserable existence. Just then some one touched his arm; it was kind-hearted Mrs. Lobb, who, being well skilled in the signs of human suffering, had understood his misery, and followed at a little distance.

"Oh, sir," she said, "be not angered with me. We are all weak; but there's One as is very merciful in forgiving us our wrongdoings: he that lies there would tell you that, sir. Just draw a little nigher to the place to see the grave; the hawthorn tree above is beautiful and sweet-smelling, reminding one of himself in a way, all in white, so pure: yes, this way, sir,—yes, this is it; here's the name on the cross, and all."

"Poor gen'leman," thought Mrs. Lobb, as she wended her way back, "he'll be all the better for that fit of crying. I always thought there was wrong in that business. Well, if he's sinned once, he's sorely sorry in consequence, I know, poor gen'leman."

And Stephen bowed his head by Hugh's grave, while the birds sang joyously in the sombre yew-trees, the sunshine flashed amongst the shadows, the dew glistened like drops of glory on the grassy graves, and the morning breeze bore the scent of the hawthorn tree afar.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ADVOCATE.

"Oh, how can beautie master the most strong,
And simple truth subdue avenging wrong!
. . . . . One loving houre
For many years of sorrow can dispense;
A dram of sweet is worth a pound of soure."

EVERYTHING looks so fresh after early summer rain: the rich deep green of the mountain slopes; the sparkling emerald of the young shoots in the leafy woods; the bright, yet soft, tints of the refreshed pastures; all is vivified, and pleasant to the eye! Down the glen the torrent foamed, purple and turbid with the soil it washed; rushing past the grim rocks and black boulder stones, which, now that winter desolation was over, cherished in many a chink and cranny bright bits of moss or wavy fern and grass.

Up the path, the short way to Rhiw, Philip strode, shouting, whistling, singing, and spring-

ing from stone to stone, after an absurd and insane manner. Fortunately there was no one to see, and thanks to the thunder of the water no one to hear, otherwise he would have been set down from that moment as very wild indeed; for the shouts he gave vent to were, to speak mildly, remarkable.

It might be that the freshness around infused into him new sensations; perhaps so: but I cannot help thinking it was something that occurred in the old parlour at Hafod that caused him to break forth into what, for the sake of politeness, let us call, jubilant song.

He left Mary standing at the window: very nervous she was, and frightened too; for he had told her in a quick, abrupt way, every fibre of his frame quivering, that she might make life either a joy or curse to him. He had told her this, and waited for her to speak; which she did not do. Then he reviled himself for an old fool, and was tearing off, when she laid her hand on his, and put up her face to be kissed, in the most childlike and natural manner possible; which action he performed in the most natural manner possible too.

And this highly absurd proceeding might have been prolonged to an indefinite period, had not the party returned from the shore, when he

hurriedly whispered, — "I shall be back in the evening, Mary. I'd sooner face a whole tribe of Redskin braves than meet a soul now," and was off.

It *may* have been the beauties of nature that caused him to feel thus jubilant as he passed up the glen; but I think otherwise, and so do you, my friend, I doubt not. Well, after consuming much tobacco, while lying on his back on a gorgeously caparisoned sofa the whole afternoon, he rose, shook himself (figuratively), and, telling his housekeeper not to expect him till she saw him, strode away in the direction of Hafod again; determining to make short work of everything, and go straight to Mr. Gwynne, and ask him plain at once, "May I have Mary?"

This resolve, however, he was not able to carry into execution instantly on his arrival, inasmuch as the evening being fine they were all out on the beach, grouped with the people who were busily engaged in collecting what the rising tide brought ashore; except Mary, who, under the impression she was sketching, sat at some distance off, all alone. Philip, being fond of drawing, joined her, and Mary was still sketching, so they all believed, when the great round moon rose beyond the hill, and looked solemnly down on the dying day.

Master John has been wet through, and had

his things changed three times already. "There never was such a boy!" so Mrs. Pritchard said; "it was impossible to keep him either clean or dry. He is wet up to the shoulders for the fourth time; but, thank goodness! it will be bedtime d'rekly, and he shall march straight upstairs. I never did see such another; 'cept, forsooth, his—— Well, well, what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh."

Mr. Gwynne was tired of the noise and hubbub at last, and he and Maud sauntered slowly homewards. She was in the habit of describing every scene to him, and now she word-painted the sunset beach. By the time they got to the house, the moon shone high, in the unclouded heaven, and the daylight was gone.

They stood by the low dark arch of the doorway a moment, and an old recollection sweeping over her, she exclaimed,—

"Hugh was right when he said that commune with nature was hallowing: truly it makes the heart yearn to be of that primal purity——"

She suddenly stopped, for a man stepped out of the doorway. Exclamations of surprise, some stammered words in return, and then Mr. Gwynne bade Stephen Forrester welcome; warmly, too, for he was right glad to see him. And Maud? She shook hands indeed, but quickly withdrew

her ungloved fingers, as if they had touched hot iron.

Inviting him to enter, Mr. Gwynne expressed his pleasure at Stephen's unexpected visit, and told Maud to order supper in, as of course Stephen must want refreshment. Stephen neither accepted nor declined the proffered hospitality, but stood there like a man on whom mortal pain was fastening, with the big drops coming out on his forehead.

Maud had good eyes, and the parlour being well lit, the change in his face, its whiteness and troubled look, were clearly revealed; whether she saw it or not did not appear, for she spoke coldly, and occupied herself needlessly about her father's chair. She was annoyed at Stephen's coming, and annoyed that her father should welcome him so warmly—annoyed and angry, consequently she looked and spoke anything but amiably; never even appearing to know that the supper, which had been quickly brought in, was untasted.

Thus they remained, until, with an involuntary cry, she suddenly started up and rushed out of the room. It had burst on her that Philip and Stephen would meet!

Stephen, unconscious of much that had passed, remembering little or nothing of that night when he all but sank in the dark pool under

Forrestrange, would, she knew, meet Philip without ill-will: his disposition, too, prone to forgive and forget—yes, indeed, *forget*—prevented his ever bearing hatred or revenge for long. Maud knew that so far as *he* was concerned, her fears need not be roused. But Philip, so fierce and strong! how would it be with him? She must see him; and the old feeling of misery, when she knelt to him that night in her despair, clutched her heart.

"Dear me," said Mr. Gwynne, "what is the matter with Maud?"

She had not far to go; Philip and Mary were close by the house, in advance of the others, who, delayed by Master John's most tardy and unwilling movements homewards, had scarcely yet ascended the hill.

"Dr. Bryan," said Maud, hastily, "I want to speak to you; walk out yonder with me."

"Philip," she began, when they were a little distance off, "you fulfilled a promise made to me once—you remember it?"

"Ay," he said, looking at her wonderingly.

"Though you performed *that*, can you do me another service?"

"Ay, that is ——" he hesitated, then said, in a low deep tone, "that is, if I may call you sister."

"You may."

"Ask what you will—if man can do it, by heaven! it shall be done," he said, earnestly.

"Brother," but her voice trembled so she could hardly command her words; "brother, will you meet the man—the remorseful man—the man who would give all he possesses on earth to blot out the past? Will you meet him, not as an enemy, but a man forgiven?"

Philip stood still, as if fixed to the spot: a sudden revulsion of feeling chilled his blood.

"Is that it?" he asked, coldly.

"Yes: he is here."

"You ask too much," he said.

"Philip," urged Maud, making a desperate effort to speak calmly, "how can I suffer you to call me sister, if the old memory is so fast rooted in your heart?"

"Old memory be ——," he savagely said.

"How can you be so wicked as to draw Mary's affection, if ——"

"If what? there are no *ifs*."

"None, save by your own showing," she said. "But if what cannot be recalled is to poison the whole of your life—if bitter sorrow on *his* part avails nothing—if, as I conclude from this, a remnant of the old feeling still haunts your breast, ought this young girl's love to be sought by you?"

"She does love me, doesn't she?" he said, suddenly softening.

"You know it."

"Then," he interrupted, his sternness vanishing, "the past is dead. I will meet him; and I will bear him no ill-will, but forgive for ever and ever."

"Thank God, my brother!" and with the tears running down her face, she left him and hastened back.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END.

"And there ends the story of misery, and the moral with it."

"I AM sufficiently punished," groaned Stephen that night in his room.

He and Philip had met; they had been introduced by Mr. Gwynne, who thought them strangers to each other personally; had sat together, talked, and finally, on Philip's departure for Rhiw, shaken hands: the present, for each, was much too intense to allow thought of the past.

Philip had gone off jubilant, for he had had the wished-for interview. Mr. Gwynne was too much amazed to say more than "the child! the child! what does the child say herself?"

Stephen had drawn rapid conclusions, which were all wrong; but which, notwithstanding, troubled him equally, during this woful night.

"Do all get punished as I am?" he asked himself, as he lay tossing in bed. "Of course Maud is going to marry this man: of course."

At length the morning broke. For three nights, as we have seen, he had slept but little, if indeed any. When he went downstairs to-day, Maud (she was the only one down)—even Maud—was touched by his haggard appearance, and said, almost kindly,

"Surely you cannot be well?"

"Oh, yes, he was; quite well: perhaps he might be rather done up, for he had come a long way the previous day and night."

"Indeed. How far?"

"Oh, a long way—from a place they call—Westcliffe."

Then a great silence fell. Each might hear the heart of the other beat. So near, yet so widely sundered! The colour that rushed over Maud's face, forehead, and neck, faded now into marble whiteness. A quick instinct, as he spoke, told her that the hour she had secretly dreaded for years had come; and she stood there, rending to pieces a flower she held in her hand.

"From—Westcliffe," he stammered out again.

She only looked stedfastly down: her white lips could form no words.

"I know—all," he said again.

Then she raised her pure eyes, and looked mutely at him; awaiting what he would say, like a poor wretch waiting the judge's sentence.

"And—and—I—came—to——" but he broke down.

Her white lips moved.

"Will you take him from me?"

Stephen burst out,—

"Oh, you have denied me your love: can you deny me his?"

She made a movement with her hand: it was an old habit of hers which he well remembered. The woman was just the same as the girl of former years.

"Oh!" he went on, "I see: you regard me as a deadly upas——"

"That is it," she interrupted, a sudden passion bringing back the blood to her face. "That is it: as the upas you have been to me. My girlhood, early womanhood, was blighted by you; and now you would blight middle age too."

"Say on, Maud! I knew you hated me; tell me how much: I deserve it all."

"Yes! you cast a shadow over my life," she continued, disregarding his interruption.

"Because," he broke in, "I inspired you with repugnance: you hated me."

"Hated you?" she went on, borne away with overpowering passion. "Hated you? No. Not for an hour, a moment, in those days; but I loved you—yes, you, Stephen Forrester—as few love—

with all my being. Oh, it was sinful! for I forgot the Creator in the creature."

"Maud—Maud!"

"Hear me out: I loved you until I had to pray against it; for you married. I took it as a punishment for the idolatrous love I bore you. Then when early womanhood departed—when hot trials and sharp miseries had done their work—then the memory of that love died, and other things grew around, to absorb the strong feelings nature gave me. Then, and not till then, came——"

"Hatred," he slowly said, folding his arms, the veins in his temples swelling like cords.

"Hatred," she repeated. "Yes, you shall have your boy," she continued, with unsteady voice; "you never cared for me, and little you will heed the pain it costs me to part with my darling. Oh, yes! I knew it would come to this one day."

Swiftly she moved away, while Stephen uttered no word. Up to the boy's room she went.

"Don't wake him," whispered Mrs. Pritchard, who happened to be there. "Let him have his sleep out. The child tired himself so yesterday that maybe he won't wake for another hour."

Maud made no reply, but bent down him, as he lay fast asleep. Had he been a plain, puny, unhealthy child, her love would have been just as

strong doubtless, but Mrs. Pritchard remarked, apologetically, as it were,—

"It is indeed impossible not to be fond of him; I never saw a beautifuller boy in all my born days."

She was right: he was perfectly lovely; and a painter would have experienced delight in beholding him as he lay there. He *was* a pretty boy; and as Maud bent over him, a desperate feeling rose within her, that she could not, would not part with him, yet—just yet.

"Missy, you want your breakfast; it don't do for you to wait so long, you look fit to drop," remarked Mrs. Pritchard, softly.

However, the boy awoke; seeing Maud, he grasped her round the neck, and drew her head to the pillow. She kissed him passionately, and gathered him close.

"My darling!" she murmured. Rising suddenly, she said, "You must get up now."

"What's in the wind?" thought Mrs. Pritchard.

"Maudee, where am I going?" asked John, when dressing was over.

"To take this—this ring—to Squire Forrester," she said, in a measured way, unlocking a drawer in the wardrobe, which Master John had never seen opened before, and which he regarded as a kind of Golconda. There was nothing in it

but a desk, a tattered child's hat, and two or three other small things; shabby reminiscences which made his little cheeks tingle. She took the desk out, unlocked it, and pressed a secret spring. There lay the ring, just as she found it after Hugh's death. Giving it to the child, she closed his fingers on it, and bade him follow her.

"See, Maudee," cried the boy, as they came into the hall, "there is Squire Forrester out in the garden."

"Run to him and kiss him; give him the ring —it is his; and, my darling, you are his too."

He looked up at her, dismayed by her faltering voice.

"No," he said, stoutly: "he shall have this ring, but he shall not have me." Then clutching her tight, he asked, "Shall he, Maudee?"

Stephen, as they approached, neither advanced to meet them nor retreated. He stood silent, rigid, as if animal life was suspended.

"Put up your face to kiss him," whispered Maud.

The boy did so, holding up the ring at the same time.

"Maudee told me to kiss you, but I can't if you won't kiss me," he said.

But Stephen only covered his face and bowed

his head. Maud turned away, and was leaving him; when with strong sobbing he broke out,—

"Oh, Maud! my first, my best, my only love, you will not leave me? I cannot go thus, Maud."

But she went straight on, never heeding, and vanished within the house.

"You have vexed Maudee and made her angry," said John, looking with great solemn eyes at Stephen. "Have you been naughty?"

"Do you know what I do when I have been naughty?" pursued the child, innocently. "I get sorry, and then Maudee always forgives. Come and say you are sorry." And he reached his little hand up, and tried to draw Stephen on: "Come, and then Maudee will give us nice breakfast, and such bootiful big shrimps; come."

"My boy," said Stephen at length, "go to her, never vex her again, be a good boy; love her always more than anyone in the world, and say I ask her pardon, my boy," and he walked hastily away as the child scampered indoors.

Stephen soon left Hafod far behind, but, by the time he got to Carrag, he felt so ill and tired, that he turned to the inn, "the Rhiw Arms," for rest before he proceeded farther; and requesting to be shown a bedroom, flung himself on the bed, and

from sheer fatigue and weariness, fell into a heavy sleep.

When he awoke again the rays from the low sun came streaming in through the open window, and dancing shadows of quivering leaves played on the opposite wall. He rose and ate some dinner; and then the temptation of drugging himself again into stupid insensibility came frightfully upon him, and he ordered a bottle of brandy; he was in the act of raising a glass to his lips, when suddenly he set it down and rushed out. On he strode down Carrag Street, which now lay in evening shadow under the great rocks rising abruptly against the western sky, until turning the corner of the cliff he came into the full blaze of a glorious June sunset, flooding the sea and coast with golden haze.

He stopped and rested on a stone, looking down on the vessels at anchor outside the bar, waiting for the tide which was, indeed, beginning to flow. He sat here, while the day ended and the night began, and the white-sailed ships came into harbour, and the full tide lay lustrous and calm in the still evening, under the great moon shining in the clear night sky. At length he rose, "Why should I part thus from her?" he asked himself; "it is insane to act in this way. I am no foolish boy, to run away in hot passion, as I did formerly.

I will go back and bid her farewell calmly—for ever, if need be—and either take or leave the boy. I cannot determine which, until I know whether she is going to marry that man or not. Yes: I must bid her farewell."

It is sad, but true, that women do not appreciate being renounced, however great the sacrifice may be on the man's part; their nature is to make sacrifices, and not to accept them; and so when John had run in this morning, and told Maud in a whisper that Squire Forrester begged pardon, and was very sorry, and would never vex her any more, and was gone away, she felt suddenly wounded; the proud, mature woman experienced a sharp pain, and secretly dropped some hot tears over "love, life, and all things."

"And the end has come," she mused, in her own room during that bright summer day. "And now he will take little John, and the child will soon forget and become indifferent to me; and I, with the strong love gnawing at my heart for ever, shall be left uncared for." Then she went back to the years when Stephen was all the world to her, and she lived over again that miserable time when she was tortured with sickening jealousy and overpowering love; then came the quenching of this frantic feeling, and sympathy and pity welled up instead, as she saw him striving to expiate his

errors. As she thought on these things the lapse of years was forgotten, and Maud felt like the passionate girl once more; the pity which shed over all things its own hallowing light, but which had been chased away when Stephen became unshackled and independent, returned and softened her cold, hard heart, just as soft sunshine loosens ice-bound earth.

"If only he would come back, that I might tell him I am not so unfeeling as I appeared to be last night! He suffered cruelly, and I want to be friends." Thus she thought, as at close of day she took a solitary ramble under the sycamore-trees.

"If only she would let me thank her, and bless her for raising me from degradation, I should be more reconciled to leaving her," thought Stephen. "It maddens me to reflect on the doom I have brought on myself by my accursed folly." And he leant on the Hafod gate which he had now reached, and vaguely watched a white figure pacing under the dark trees. It was Maud, in a light summer dress, as he presently discovered.

"I came to say good-bye, Maud," he said, meeting her, "and to thank you and bless you before you marry; for I suppose I may conclude ——" but Stephen's voice broke, and the sentence remained unfinished.

"I don't know what you mean," said Maud, in a dry, hard tone: "unless, indeed you think I am going to marry Dr. Bryan. You are wrong; he is Mary's; I shall never marry."

"Well, whether or no, I cannot bear this any longer," pursued Stephen, hoarsely. "God alone knows how I have suffered during the last—— well, since I parted from you in mad rage, years and years ago at Woodford; so now I have come to say farewell calmly——oh, yes, Maud, I am quite calm——, before I give up home, and leave England. I cannot be near you, and you nothing to me; and in travelling abroad, perhaps in time I may get indifferent to——to what now causes me acute misery. Will you say good-bye, and shall we part friends, Maud, for the sake of old times?" In the dusk shadows, her sudden pallor was not visible. "Well, Maud, must I take your hand, for the last time perhaps; and will you neither look at me nor speak? And do you let it lie passive like this? say something, this silence is worse than all. Not a word, Maud? and I going one way in the world and you another! What would my father have said!"

"Maud," recommenced Stephen in a different voice, and bending towards her, "when I leave you I shall have no hope in life." She made the old movement with her hand; he remembered it

well. "I see you don't like my touching you; you told me so before. Pardon me. I am not a cold-tempered man." He moved some steps off; then, as if choking, said, "I shall never see you again, Maud; my deep love, my wretchedness, is nothing to you. You are a proud, cold, unforgiving, heartless woman, and I suppose my punishment for the sins which have steeled you against me, will be this frantic, foolish love, which makes a hell of earth, whenever I am near you."

"Don't talk in that absurd way, Stephen," interrupted Maud, in a trembling voice. "You seem to me to be quite infatuated. If Hugh were here, he would tell you, you are not worse than the Prodigal son, I am sure," and here she could repress her tears no longer, and fairly sobbed.

Stephen stood looking at her for a few moments, then in a low, broken voice, said,—

"Maud, if in years to come you could overcome the repugnance you have for me, I would try harder than ever to atone for my past misdoings." But Maud's head drooped, and only tears came for answer. "I believe you would wash my sin away if you could," he said unsteadily.

"I would," she replied, suddenly raising her head.

"And yet you consign me to a miserable and hopeless life in this world!"

"If I consign you to it, I consign myself to it," she said, hastily.

The blood rushed tumultuously to his face, and springing to her side, he whispered breathlessly,

"Maud—darling—then I may love you;" and enclosing her in his arms, he kissed her forehead and cheek again and again. "Be my wife and good angel, Maud, and let us pass through life together," he said, gathering her closer still, and she clasping his neck, lifted her face and said, in a gentle, serious way,

"May we be a help meet for one another, Stephen? God bless you, my only love." Then extricating herself, she ran indoors, and he presently followed.

Stephen sought Mr. Gwynne and they conversed apart. Mr. Gwynne sent for Maud, and when she entered, Stephen rose, and taking her hand said, reverentially,

"I thank God for his wondrous mercy." And Mr. Gwynne was quite overpowered, and retired with the tears rolling down his cheeks: he could only say to himself, "He was so glad Stephen and Maud understood each other at last."

Stephen urged Maud not to delay their marriage; he should not feel sure of possessing his treasure

until they were married; and what need for delay? He looked and spoke with his old impetuosity and eagerness; and she, smiling, exclaimed,

"Then it is Stephen—my Stephen, after all."

The story of sin and its retribution, of sorrow and repentance, is ended; only a few words more.

Stephen and Maud have been married twelve years. Who in all England more respected than Squire Forrester and his wife?

Stephen's resemblance to his father is most striking, not only in appearance, but in his manner and way of speaking. When he was elected chairman of the quarter sessions at Frorn, on the day he took his seat it really seemed as if the old squire had come back. That day, too, Mr. Gwynne, quite an aged man now, was led into court by Mr. Rolands, now clerk of the peace for the county, and put in his place on the grand jury for the first time these twenty years. Indeed, it created quite a sensation, and two or three of the elderly magistrates had sudden attacks of catarrh; while the young lawyers present began to calculate, that "honesty was, perhaps, the best policy," for here was this Rolands, who began life with nothing, now the first lawyer in the place, doing all the conveyancing and county business.

Curiously enough, Mr. Rolands married the daughter of Mr. Gwynne's co-trustee, Miss Stan-

ford, who, having begun to educate Mary Gwynne, would not give up till her pupil became Mrs. Bryan; then Miss Stanford married Mr. Rolands.

Mary and Philip suit each other exactly. They take long yachting voyages every year, children and all. The beautiful yacht, the *Mary*, is the pride and admiration of the little port of Carrag, where her moorings are; and Mary takes as much pleasure in the sea trips as Philip does himself. He pets and spoils his wife as much as ever, and she thinks there is no one to be compared to him in the world.

Mrs. Pritchard's affections are rent between the six Rhiw children and the two Forrestrange boys, and there the eight cousins meet; Mr. Gwynne prudently retires to Maud and Stephen, the romping and clamour being too much for him. Susan is nurse to the youngest Master Forrester, "Hugh Gwynne Forrester" by name; her office is no sinecure, for of all living things that child has a knack of getting into imminent danger, and mocking her with derisive sounds, sending the poor thing almost into fits. The eldest, Stephen, is five years older, and is at school, returning every holiday with a new stock of delightful perils for Hugh's benefit and Susan's tribulation. But the great joy to all is when John gets leave from his ship, her Majesty's line-

of-battle ship the *Nemesis*, whereon he was midshipman, and is now lieutenant. Stephen tells Maud she spoils and pets John far more than her own children. Perhaps she does; and the lad loves her with a love which is almost worship. The last time he bid her good-bye, his face flushed and his eyes filled (Blanche it seems had been acrimonious to the lad); and he flung himself on his knees, and buried his face in Maud's lap, and prayed soon to meet the enemy, that he might fight and make a name for himself, and win laurels to bring to her; and Maud kissed his head and said,

"You are my son, and I love you, my dear; call me mother always."

Blanche hates John, and would be downright rude, snappish she is to all; but on that occasion Maud drew herself up like offended majesty, and Blanche was silenced by the grave, quiet, distant manner; so John is now left unnoticed. Poor Blanche has a worrying time of it; she has a pet parrot, which Master Hugh is for ever letting out of its gilt cage, a great Angola cat, to which the said youth is the author of much woe; and a lovely "King Charles," which is furtively dipped in the river, and runs dripping and yelping home: the parrot was last seen flying out of the window towards the great wood, and has not yet come

back. Maud tries to soothe Blanche, and Hugh has been punished; but poor Blanche, who has become thin and angular, continues very cross. Fortunately this ill-humour does not affect the household much, Maud being so genial and happy that her influence fills the house like summer light. Maud is a very dignified-looking woman, but unaffectedly benignant, and commands respect wherever she goes; the love she inspires in those around her is wonderful, and the faith and confidence they yield her are entire. People who only meet her occasionally, and do not know her and are given to detract from everyone, say she wishes to take the lead in everything, and be the first in company; it would be difficult to find the company where she would not be first, and the matter in which she would not take the lead naturally, if she gave it her attention. The old squire was quite right, Mrs. Forrester *is* one of the noblest, grandest women in the world. Stephen thinks so too, and on the twelfth anniversary of their wedding-day, as they two stood on the terrace, the golden harvest over all the land, and the glorious sun flushing the evening sky with rosy light, he said,

"Maud, I bless you for having become my wife. Truly, you have been the good angel that has saved——"

"Dear Stephen," she interrupted, "you yourself fought against evil;—you persevered, and you conquered."

She looked at him fondly, and he clasped her round and gazed into the depths of her pure eyes with intense love and devotion. They stood thus, while the old familiar music of the birds seeking their leafy nests after the day's wanderings, the deep tone of the flowing river, and the voices of the children returning from the hay meadows, alone broke the silence. As they stood thus, the rays of the setting sun lighted up his grey hairs, and the silver threads in her hair were tinged with gold. The moon rose in the far east, and the red flush faded from the western sky. The heat and toil of the day were over, and the river shone bright as the current of their wedded life. "Yes," continued Maud, "you fought resolutely, Stephen, and God helped you; *as He helps others, too,* in their warfare." And now this drama of life is ended: evening stillness and rest have fallen, and peace reigns over Forrest-range.

THE END.

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